In Enigmate: The Evolution of a Riddlic Idea
from Symphosius to the Child Ballads

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Declaration

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Summary

This thesis studies the evolution of a particular riddle complex within the sub-genre of the Symphosian Riddle, a development over more than a thousand years in which, I argue, the line of influence is unusually clear. Chapter one is divided into a translation of the *Symphosii Scholastici Aenigmata*—the first complete translation to appear in English since that of Raymond Ohl in 1928—and an essay dealing with the problems entailed in translating both Symphosius and riddle texts in general. Thereafter, the thesis traces a progression through four main "texts" which, it agues, mark significant stages in the development of the Symphosian Riddle. The first, Symphosius' *Aenigmata* is the foundation text of the genre. The next, *De Creatura*, is an ambitious eighty-three line work by Aldhelm, Symphosius' closest imitator who, in effect, "invents" the Creation Riddle. The line of development continues through *Riddle 40, 66,* and *93* from the *Exeter Book* which variously rework the dualistic imagery of *De Creatura*. Most significantly, *Riddle 93* distils this imagery into short, discrete riddle "clues" which pass into oral tradition. Finally, the influence of the Symphosian Riddle can be discerned in the adaptations, over six versions, of an English ballad known as "Riddles Wisely Expounded" (Child 1). In this latter stage, the descriptive "clues" of the *Exeter Book* Creation Riddles separate into a series of single line questions in a riddle contest between the Devil and a young girl over the nature of the world—and the fate of her immortal soul. These single line questions reappear in ballads concerned not with Creation and the nature of things, but rather with love and matrimony.

Common to each of these riddle "collections", either collectively or singly, is that it deals with and interprets the nature of things. This thesis credits Aldhelm with the further development that becomes the Creation Riddle, the idea that the

manifest world of physical phenomena encompasses and unites all contraries and contradictions—in short, that creation is the ultimate paradox and is therefore the ultimate riddle subject.

In using a literary methodology of close textual and aesthetic analysis to chart the dynamic evolution of this particular riddlic idea, this thesis offers a substantially new approach to the study of riddles. It differs from literary scholars (such as Orchard or Lapidge) who have approached riddle texts as if they were static literary artefacts, from folklorists (like Pavlovskis or Blauner) who offer generalist surveys of diverse riddle traditions, and from anthropologists (like Dundes or Maranda) whose focus has been on the social function of riddles.

Furthermore, in undertaking what might be described as a "case study" of a particular riddlic idea, this thesis demonstrates the capacity of literary and cultural forms to persist, transform, and reinvent in ways that reflect and respond to changing cultural imperatives. This demonstration is, in itself, a contribution to the field of cultural studies. Equally important, the thesis shows that, whatever their status in the modern world, in antiquity and throughout much of our history, the Riddle has been a serious poetic genre which, by virtue of its deployment of paradox at the furthest edges of linguistic signification, is uniquely suited to expressing and meditating upon the otherwise unsayable and ineffable aspects of the human condition. Indeed, for ancient thinkers, the process of unravelling and penetrating to the meaning of a riddle may, under certain circumstances, enact the religious experience of passing from ignorance into understanding. Finally, this thesis suggests that the riddlic disposition to see the miraculous in the mundane and to reconceive the world in surprising new ways is at the heart of English poetry and are still an important route to wisdom.

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Preface

Your soul covered the earth,
and you filled it with parables and riddles.
—— Sirach 47:15 (RSV)

I first encountered what I now term a "Symphosian Riddle" as a child. Quite serendipitously, I started looking through Michael Alexander's *The Earliest English Poems*, intrigued by its title; I had no idea of what the history of English poetry might be, nor what its earliest poems might be like. Of all the strange and wonderful poems in the volume, it was the riddles from the *Exeter Book* which caught my attention—or more accurately, it was the idea that riddles were amongst our earliest poems. I started reading them, trying to guess their answers but I soon realised that, not only could I not see their solutions, I could not even see that they were riddles. They were not phrased as questions and, in the main, they did not turn on a logical or linguistic trick. Increasingly perplexed, I went looking for other riddles in other volumes and came across this: "Wha[n] antecryst is come in to this worlde what thynge shall be hardest to hym to knowe?" A perplexing question indeed, yet I found the answer even more perplexing: "A hande barowe for of that he shall not knowe whiche ende shall goo before."[1] My unarticulated but strongly felt definition of a riddle at the time dictated that a riddle should be a puzzle whose clues could *only* be satisfied by one answer so that a diligent guesser could, with careful thought, solve it. The answer to this riddle, a "hande barowe", though it conforms to the implicit "logic" of riddles, seemed random. Certainly, the Antichrist might be perplexed by a hand barrow, but why should he find it *most* perplexing of all? Why should he not be more perplexed by a plate, beaker, bowl or jar? After all, none of these has a front and back. Why should he not be more perplexed by a sieve? A

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[1] Anon. *The demau*[n]*des ioyous* [Enprynted at London: in Flete strete at the sygne of the sonne by me wynkyn de worde, In the yere of our lorde a M.CCCCC. and xi.] [1511], from Electronic reproduction (Ann Arbor, 1999) Early English Books Online, 34:10., 2, accessed 15/12/2008.

sieve is a container which does not contain what is put in it! Indeed, why should the Antichrist be *most* perplexed by an object at all? Why not be more perplexed by a bow or handshake or any other human custom without obvious function?

It was not until my first academic encounter with riddling that I started to guess the answer, or at least, to understand that I had asked the wrong questions. This encounter came during my Masters thesis which was initially conceived as a study of the survival strategies of female characters in the Child Ballads but rapidly became concerned with the single most successful of these; riddling. I came to see that in the folk culture which produced the ballads, riddles performed a range of psychological and cultural functions. My myopic concern with the riddle's answer had, in the kind of irony I now regard as an occupational hazard for the riddle scholar, prevented me from "solving" the riddle; certainly it had prevented me from understanding it. I came to realize that the answer is important not in itself, but because it valourizes a particular kind of thinking (what I term "riddle wit") and even more significantly, because of what it suggests about the nature of the world. The point of the riddle is that, despite the might and power of the Antichrist, in fact *because* of it, he is ignorant of the simplest pieces of common knowledge concerning everyday life. Worse, when confronted with the alien hand barrow, the Antichrist is so lacking in riddle wit that, like myself, he asks the wrong question; it does not matter which way a hand barrow faces.

So this subversive riddle, in mocking the horrors of the Apocalypse and the powers of the Antichrist, is cathartic. It reminds its audience that the mighty are fallible, that the humble may know things of which the powerful are ignorant and, most importantly, that things are not always as they seem. This riddle, like all riddles, takes the audience through a process. The audience must first ponder the question and then, when the riddle is solved, fathom the answer. During this process, there is a constant negotiation between the audience and the riddle as the audience measures the riddle against its experience of the world. Teaching riddle literature I have found that students who would not dream of criticizing the structure,

conceit, thought or imagery of a poem will challenge an answer or dismiss entirely a riddle which does not satisfy riddle logic and their experience of the nature of things. When a riddle does satisfy these criteria, the audience experiences a catharsis born of being shown the world in a new light which each nevertheless recognizes as true; a strange mixture of unfamiliarity and recognition.

Intrigued by this glimmer of understanding, my Masters thesis became a study of the mechanics and narrative function of riddles and riddling in the Child Ballads. I was especially intrigued by the ballad singers' constant adaptation of traditional riddles to suit the changing nature of the encounters described in their narratives. Naturally, I became increasingly curious about the history and origins of the riddles (if oral traditions may be said to have origins). Through Atkinson's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* I became aware of the connection with the *Exeter Book* riddles and from there with Aldhelm and finally Symphosius. And so I came back to my childhood perplexity over how the enigmatic descriptions in the *Exeter Book* acted as "riddles"; all the more so now I was aware that they were part of a wider tradition—what I now call the "Symphosian tradition". Although they have elements in common with the "Antichrist riddle", Symphosian riddles prove far more complex and far more culturally alien to the modern world. This thesis does not attempt to encompass the whole tradition. Rather it follows the strand from which the Child Ballad riddles are descended: riddles on Creation. It presents an analysis of how these riddles work and of how they interpret that Creation. The present thesis, then, charts my own journey with riddling in reverse.

A Note on the Texts

Our earliest text of Symphosius' *Symphosii Scolastici Aenigmata* appears in the *Codex Salmasianus*, a North African miscellany of the seventh century (though it was probably compiled in the early sixth century)[2] which includes fragments from various famous ancient authors, lesser late antique Latin poetry, and collections of epigrams. Bergamin has identified thirty-two manuscripts of the *Aenigmata* spanning a period from the seventh to the fourteenth century, more or less divided into two recensions, B and D. Riese suggests that both of the two recensions date back to the sixth century and that the D tradition derives from an authorial revision, though, increasingly, the latter hypothesis is thought to be unlikely. Rather, scholars have adopted Baehrens' 1882 theory that two scholars or grammarians emended a parent manuscript of *Codex Salmasianus*, each making different "corrections" and so producing the two recensions. Ohl sums up current critical estimation of the two recensions when he comments:

> "the readings of B... are often less felicitous than those of D, in a few
> instances they are quite unmetrical; they seem, too, to have suffered
> greater corruption in transmission. On the other hand, while none of
> the versions of D are unmetrical, many are at the best obvious
> attempts to better something not quite fully understood in B."[3]

In view of this, Bergamin has recently produced an edition of the *Aenigmata* based "sulla collazione completa di tutti i codici noti"[4] ("on the complete collation of all

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[2] R. Ohl *The Enigmas of Symphosius* (Philadelphia, 1928),15.
[3] Ibid., 26.
[4] M. Bergamin *Aenigmata Symposii: La Fondazione dell'Enigmistica Come Genere Poetico* (Firenze, 2005), lxxxviii.

the known codices"). I have adopted Bergamin's Latin text throughout the thesis, with a few minor alterations. These will be signalled in their places.

For Aldhelm's *Enigmata* I have used Ehwald's masterful edition throughout. I have used Muir's edition of the *Exeter Book*. All pre-twentieth century versions of the ballad known as "Riddles Wisely Expounded", including the mid-fifteenth century lyric *Inter Diabolus et Virgo* (Rawlinson MS. D. 328, fol. 174 b), are drawn from Child's monumental five volume masterpiece *English and Scottish Ballads* published between 1882—1898, but recently reprinted in 2003. For later versions of the ballad I have relied on Bronson's equally authoritative 1959 *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*. For Symphosius' text I have provided a translation and commentary. For the other texts, which are less problematic, I have provided full texts in the order they are discussed. For all Biblical quotations I have endeavoured to use the version of the Bible which had greatest currency or was most likely to be known to each poet. For Symphosius, Aldhelm and the *Exeter Book* poet(s) I have used Jerome's Vulgate[5] with English translations taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible. For the Child Ballads, I have used the King James Version. For convenience and clarity, I have used Loeb editions of Greek and Latin texts. I have used standard English titles for all works in Greek; for non-English texts written in languages which use the Latin alphabet, I have retained the titles of the original language. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated. In the interests of clarity and in the absence of an agreed convention, I write "riddle" for an individual riddle, but capitalize it "Riddle" when referring to the genre as a whole.

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[5] I have accepted the view that the Vulgate became standard relatively quickly, as Pope Damasus hoped when he commissioned it in 382 and although, as Rebenich notes, figures such as Augustine used both the Vulgate and the Old Latin texts, the Vulgate was popular and the version most likely to be known to Symphosius. See G. Bowersock, P. Brown and O. Grabar, eds. *Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MS., 1999), 341, S. Rebenich *Jerome* (London, 2002), 25. For the Vulgate as the Bible of the Anglo-Saxons, see M. Lapidge, ed. *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Angl-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2001), 64. Although Aldhelm occasionally uses the Old Latin Bible, he seems to have favoured the Vulgate, with which he was clearly very conversant. See R. Marsden *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1995), 65.

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Introduction

Riddling: Symphosius in Context

ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν," ἔφη, "τὸ ζητεῖν ἀρχή. τοῦ δὲ ζητεῖν τὸ
θαυμάζειν καὶ ἀποπεῖν, εἰκότως τὰ πολλὰ τῶν περὶ τὸν θεὸν ἔοικεν
αἰνίγμασι κατακεκρύφθαι.[1]

——Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 385.2

The Riddle is a perplexing form, especially in the modern world where it has largely been consigned to school playgrounds and Christmas bon-bons. But, as this thesis will show, it was a significant, complex genre in the ancient world. On the one hand, it was regarded as a fitting form for oracles, prophecies, and, as the quote from Plutarch (above) suggests, a form through which the Divine mysteries might be understood and explored. On the other, as ancient authors from Aristophanes to Athenaeus demonstrate, when used comically it is a form which could be turned to biting social commentary. The formal qualities of riddles are similarly chameleonic. Unlike poetic forms such as the sonnet, villanelle, rondeau, or even the ballad, the Riddle genre is not defined by its form. Nor is it, like an elegy or an ode, defined by its content or mood which may vary from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Given the divide between modern and ancient conceptions, and the sheer diversity of riddle literature, for many years the most important discussion in Riddle

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[1] "Since," he went on to say, "inquiry is the beginning of philosophy, and wonder and uncertainty the beginning of inquiry, it seems only natural that the greater part of what concerns the god should be concealed in riddles." *Plutarch's Moralia*, F. Babbitt, trans. (London, 1936), 203.

scholarship was concerned with developing a definition for the genre. This discussion, conducted mostly by folklorists such as Taylor, Dundes, and Georges, was deeply influenced by mid-twentieth century Structuralism. They attempted to devise a general definition of the Riddle as a genre of folklore[2] which could be applied across cultures—sometimes to traditions as disparate as the Finnish and the West African—which promoted a scholarly discourse concerned with finding common ground between the numberless texts at one time or another described as "riddles". Commonalities, recurrent motifs, and structural parallels were sought (and often found) in texts originating from all over the globe and across time. This generation of folklorists is responsible for demonstrating that modern European culture is unusual in the status it currently attributes to the Riddle genre. Moreover, they have forced us to see the Riddle's interconnections with various other kinds of literature, in particular, with proverbs and wisdom literature. Awareness of these interconnections has shed light on apparently unrelated material. The observation, for example, that riddles are central to marriage rituals in many cultures[3] has allowed us to reconsider their significance in texts like *The Merchant of Venice* or the *libretto* for Puccini's *Turandot*.

Yet, despite the undoubted importance and insight of this work, it has also fostered serious misconceptions. A corollary of the search for parallels has been a tendency to blur the distinctions between different riddling cultures, and within these, between different kinds of riddles. Instead, riddles have been categorized along Structuralist lines either in terms of motifs or semantic structure—important categories to be sure, but not the only ones. This Structuralist approach is particularly unhelpful in understanding heterogeneous riddle collections such as, for instance, the one Athenaeus preserves for us. In all cases, it is more productive to assume the cultural specificity of riddles, and to inquire into why they are regarded as paradoxical or riddlic at any particular time and place, than to expect that they

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[2] The most notable of these attempts were made by early scholars such as Archer Taylor and later by Georges and Dundes in their influential critique of Taylor's theories. See A. Dundes and Georges, R. "Toward a Structural Definition of the Riddle" in *Journal of American Folklore*, 76 (1963), 111—18.
[3] Especially, in Greece, Turkey, and Eastern Europe.

should conform to predetermined criteria. Perhaps most significantly, folklorists have been assiduous in separating oral from written riddles, the folk from the literary riddle. Blauner makes this his main methodological focus by opening his study of the literary riddle (which, in nine pages, covers riddling cultures from China to England over a period from the eleventh century BCE to the eighteenth century CE) with the assertion that "[a]lthough literary material and folk-material are often inextricably entwined, it is best for the folklorist to separate them as much as possible".[4] One might be forgiven for thinking that such historically and culturally diverse material would suggest other distinctions which are of at least equal importance. In fact, the oral/literate divide has seemed to be of overarching importance because it describes the circumstances under which each riddle was "collected" and so came to the attention of scholars. It has dictated *which* scholars would attend to a particular riddle; oral riddles are studied by folklorists, while literary riddles have been the province of literary scholars. Consequently, the Latin and vernacular riddles of Anglo-Saxon England, which represent one of the richest sources for riddles in the English tradition, have largely been ignored by folklorists.

Anglo-Latin and Anglo-Saxon riddles—the high point of English literary riddling—have been within the purview of literary scholars. These scholars take the opposite approach from that of folklorists and encounter opposite problems. Where folklorists tend to view riddles ahistorically and solely in terms of riddle theory, literary scholars tend to treat riddles as an unusual species of poetry, even when they are reworkings or retellings of ancient riddles. This has produced close, careful, and specific literary readings which have not been vulnerable to the kinds of infelicity sometimes produced by the inclusivity of folklorists. However, in regarding, for example, the *Exeter Book* riddles as individual poetic creations, an essential aspect of the Riddle and riddling has been ignored. Thus it is crucial to read any particular version of a riddle within the context of its own history.

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[4] D. G. Blauner "The Early Literary Riddle" in *Folklore* 78 (1967), 49—58, 49.

Both literary scholars and folklorists have been prevented from a full appreciation of the history of the riddles they consider because of their reluctance to cross the oral/written divide. Indeed, to some extent, both approaches deny the fact that riddles are particularly prone to appearing in all sorts of places, across media, traditions, cultures and historical periods. In many, maybe even most, instances a riddle will have been recorded orally as well as appearing in written texts. The essence of a riddle—its device—is durable and often remains relatively unchanged over long periods of time and through many different media.[5] Gimbutas writes:

> when oral tradition offered a wellspring for written texts, in epochs
> such a Homer's Greece, the early Middle Ages, and the nineteenth
> century, the literary riddle was apt to be a recorded version of a folk
> riddle or a literary imitation of the folk genre.[6]

Yet even this under-estimates the lively, productive cross-pollination that riddles undergo as they pass through various cultural forms. Some sense of just how pervasive a riddle can be is demonstrated in the work of scholars like Hill and Borthwick who each trace the history of a single riddle. (The latter cites examples of his chosen riddle in sources from the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* to an inscription on an eighteenth century Italian Octave Spinet.) Moreover, as the work of scholars like O'Brien O'Keeffe, Scattergood, and Klein[7] demonstrate, by comparing different "versions" of a riddle produced by different cultures we are afforded a more precise insight into their cultural values.

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[5] Gimbutas describes riddles as having a "kernel metaphor" but this excludes all those riddles which turn on puns, word play and other kinds of misdirection. So instead I refer to the trick, paradox, metaphor or ambiguity which makes a riddle a riddle as its "device". This is the heart of the riddle, the aspect of it which does not change regardless of whether it is being recounted orally or in literature, and in whatever culture or period. This is a concept I shall discuss at length below. Z. Gimbutas, *The Riddle in the Poem* (Lanham, MD., 2004), 23.

[6] Ibid., 23.

[7] K. O'Brien O'Keeffe "The Text of Aldhelm's Enigma no. c Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson C. 697 and Exeter *Riddle 40*" in *Anglo-Saxon England* 14, P. Clemoes, ed. (Cambridge, 1985) 61—74., T. Klein "The Old English Translation of Aldhelm's Riddle *Lorica*" in *Review of English Studies*, New Series, 48 (1997), 345—49. and J. Scattergood "Eating the Book: Riddle 47 and Memory" in *Text and Gloss: Studies in Insular Language and Literature*, H. Conrad-O'Brien, A. D'Arcy and J. Scattergood, eds. (Dublin, 1999), 119—127.

The Symphosian Riddle

The project of this thesis is to trace the history, not of a single riddle, but a particular riddle topic (Creation) in a particular riddling tradition, the "Symphosian tradition". To some extent, by virtue of their interest in the nature of things, all riddles are concerned with Creation, but the Symphosian tradition is the first extant to make it explicitly and consistently a riddle topic. As we will see, riddles in the Symphosian tradition which take Creation are their subject—what Tupper calls the "Creation" Riddles—share a common form and a common conception of what a riddle is.[8] They constitute a distinct and separate *genus* historically and, eventually, culturally and geographically as well.

The vogue for riddles in early England was not echoed elsewhere in Europe. It was produced by a matrix of cultural influence and agendas all combining in this particular time and place, but the catalyst is the surprising and intriguing *Symphosii Scholastici Aenigmata*, a collection of one hundred Latin riddles which are the sole surviving work of an early fifth century author identified only by the pseudonym "Symphosius".[9] Set at the feast of the Saturnalia, each riddle deals with a different subject drawn from the physical world. Unlike most previous riddling, these *enigmata* took the form of obscure and witty descriptions, each designed to illuminate the aspects of their subject which are most extraordinary, paradoxical, and obscure. With a few exceptions, Symphosius' riddles are not explicitly framed as questions and each is solved by its own lemma. The challenge then is for the

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[8] I follow Tupper in using this term. F. Tupper *The Riddles of the* Exeter Book (Darmstadt, 1968), 238.

[9] There has been considerable debate around the correct dating of Symphosius. Müller places him as early as the second or third century because of his excellent Latinity and command of metrics. See L. Müller *De re metrica poetarum Latinorum praeter Plautum et Terentium libri septem* (Leipzig, 1894), 39. By contrast, Riese argues that he was contemporary with the compilers of the earliest manuscript, the *Codex Salmasianus*. See A. Riese, ed. *Anthologia Latina* (Leipzig, 1894), xxvi. However, there is now a scholarly consensus that Symphosius probably lived in the late fourth and early fifth century. See M. Bergamin *Aenigmata Symposii: La Fondazione dell'Enigmistica Come Genere Poetico* (Firenze, 2005), xiv, and R. Ohl *The Enigmas of Symphosius* (Philadelphia, 1928), 15.

audience to follow Symphosius' obscure and intricate twists of thought and unpick the implications of his multiple intertextual allusions. More significantly, as I shall argue, the sum is greater than the parts; Symphosius arranges his riddle topics so that by virtue of their interaction, they map and interrogate the human and natural worlds. More than anything else, the challenge for the audience is to engage with his vision of, as Lucretius has it, "*rerum natura*", "the nature of things".

Several factors ensured that the *Symphosii Scholastici Aenigmata* inspired a sub-genre of riddles in England. It might perhaps be better to say that it inspired an entire tradition of riddling. For one thing the riddles which belong to it borrow fairly heavily from those which have gone before. For another, Symphosius presents the riddles in such a neat and regular form—one hundred riddles, each three dactylic hexameter lines—that his collection had the effect of bestowing a typical formal structure on a genre which previously had been marked by its absence. Although many of his imitators made minor alterations in terms of their riddles' length, the regularity of Symphosius' metre persisted and had the effect of transforming the Riddle into a form which could be used to demonstrate Latin metre in Anglo-Saxon England. The number of his riddles, one hundred, became canonical for riddle collections, and, at least to begin with, his imitators adopted his most peculiar convention; entitled solutions to each riddle. Finally, and most significantly, riddles in the Symphosian tradition are marked by the absence of narrative context.

Some scholars have seen Symphosius' separation of the riddle from its narrative context (we might even say, from its narrative "cause") as the beginning of "true" riddling. Pavlovskis claims that Symphosius is a significant author because his work represents "a sizable collection of genuine riddles and nothing but riddles, without extraneous material such as fictional or mythical contexts".[10] This view suggests that it is only when the riddle is separated from context that it may genuinely be regarded as a riddle. However, I will argue that in extracting the riddle

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[10] Z. Pavlovskis "The Riddler's Microcosm: from Symphosius to St. Boniface" in *Classica et Medievalia* 39 (1988), 219—51, 221.

from narrative, Symphosius is not purifying the form, but rather, somewhat artificially, divorcing it *from* its more usual state. The Symphosian tradition lasts for a thousand years, but eventually, his riddles (or the riddles descended from his riddles) find their way back into narratives in the ballad tradition. Moreover, as we will see, the riddle-writers considered in this thesis who produce collections free of narratives each construct some kind of "context" to replace them. Symphosius himself creates a "context" for his riddles by presenting them in an interrelated, unified collection so that each is contextualized by the others.

When riddles are separated from all context, they become almost epigrams. This is, of course, what eventually happens to the literary Riddle. The literary fashion for wit in the Renaissance leads several significant poets, including Wyatt, Herbert, and Jonson, to compose epigrammatical riddle-poems in order to display their poetical dexterity. We see a similar phenomenon in the eighteenth century—another period in which the poetical fashion is for wit—particularly in Italy and France.[11] Yet, for all their dazzling dexterity, these "riddles" are predominantly a vehicle for their author's ingenuity, rather than a form which expresses the wider concerns of the text and which ultimately compels its audience to "to sharpen wits and turn to those inner things which are to be grasped".[12] The shift marks the end of the riddle as a serious genre and the beginning of its debasement into a species of joke.[13]

Symphosius' riddles "contextualize" each other because the collection is governed by such complex and intricate taxonomies.[14] However, Symphosius' imitators, including the Bern riddler and a host of English clerical riddlers such as

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[11] See M. de Fillipis *The Literary Riddle in Italy in the Eighteenth Century* (Los Angeles, 1967) and A. Taylor *The Literary Riddle Before 1600* (Los Angeles, 1948).

[12] This is Isidore's understanding of the riddle is drawn from Augustine's discussion of 1 Corinthians 13:12 in *De Trinitate* 15.9. It became the dominant understanding of riddles amongst the medieval clergy. Isidore *De Fide* 2.22, 2, translated in V. Law *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge, 1995), 24. It is discussed at greater length below.

[13] In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Subconscious* Freud argues that riddles are a related to jokes, and perform some of the same psychological functions, though in opposite ways. See S. Freud *Jokes and Their Relation to the Subconscious*, J. Carey, ed. and J. Crick, trans. (Harmondsworth, 2003), fn. 46.

[14] See appendix A.

Tatwine and Eusebius, tend to compose collections with less complex structures. They copy the accepted form with more or less assiduity, but their interest is literary, theological, or philosophical rather than riddlic. Their riddles are moving towards other literary forms and represent dead ends from the point of view of the Riddle as a genre. This thesis follows those riddle-writers whose variations on the Symphosian Riddle shift it inexorably back towards the more usual forms of folk riddling and towards the reinstatement of "context". These are also the texts which feature Creation Riddles; an interesting coincidence. While the subjects of other Anglo-Latin riddles (primarily Natural History and Theology) appeal mainly to scholars and clergymen, the nature of the created world and of the powers that rule it is a subject which, either explicitly or implicitly, dominates the cultural imagination across demographics. Perhaps the coincidence is not so surprising after all.

Chapter one of the thesis is divided into two parts: the first comprises a translation of the *Aenigmata Symphosii Scolastici*—the first complete translation to appear in English since that submitted by Raymond Ohl for his Master's thesis in 1928—accompanied by an essay dealing with the particular challenges which confront the translator of Symphosius and of riddle texts in general. The second part is an interpretative discussion of Symphosius' *Aenigmata* with a view to articulating the operation and vision of this foundation text. Thereafter, the thesis traces a progression through three main "texts" which mark the most significant developments of the Symphosian Riddle.[15] *De Creatura* is the final riddle of the *Enigmata Aldhelmi*, a work by Symphosius' closest imitator, Aldhelm. Despite his adoption of Symphosius' form for individual riddles, Aldhelm does not produce an interrelated riddle collection. Instead, as he explains, he uses his riddles for the double purpose of demonstrating the principles of Latin metrics and the dissemination of Christianity. But in the epic eighty-three line *De Creatura* with its grand sweep of sequential imagery consisting of a series of implied questions on Creation, Aldhelm engages in a totalizing exploration of the created world. He attempts, and achieves, in a single riddle what Symphosius accomplished over his

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[15] See appendix B.

riddle century. In so doing Aldhelm "invents" the Creation Riddle as a single riddle which attempts to encompass the diversity, majesty and, indeed, the enormity of Creation. It is a composition whose device (or riddlic conceit) is an expression of faith, namely, that every extreme and consequently, every contradiction, is reconciled in the riddle's answer ("Creation"), since all contraries are contained within the created world. *De Creatura's* ending adopts a more usual, *agonistic* riddle form in that it directly challenges the reader to name the subject of the description. As this riddle, rather than the Latin collections (above), represents the development of Symphosius' conception, it is the focus of chapter two.

De Creatura was so popular and widely influential that there are no less than three "Creation Riddles" in the *Exeter Book*; *Riddles 40, 66,* and *93*. These three texts are the focus of chapter three. Between them they chart the stages by which the sweeping imagery of *De Creatura* is distilled into a litany of short, discrete "clues", still cosmographical in nature, but in increasingly condensed works—*Riddle 93* is the final stage of the sequence. The *Exeter Book* "variations" on Aldhelm's *De Creatura* transform it from scholarly, ecclesiastical Latin into lively vernacular. In particular, *Riddle 93* condenses Aldhelm's complex images into oral forumalic elements which can be used in folk forms. The concern of chapter four is with the use of these elements in folk ballads. In particular, it considers the adaptations, over six versions, of an English ballad known as "Riddles Wisely Expounded" (Child 1) beginning with the earliest manuscript, which dates from the fifteenth century, and tracing it through folk versions from the eighteenth century onwards, the most recent dating to the mid-twentieth century. Over the evolution of this ballad, the riddles return to narrative and pass from literary into oral tradition. Now the descriptive "clues" of the *Exeter Book* Creation Riddles separate into discrete single line questions which form the substance of a riddle contest between the Devil and a young girl over the nature of the world. "Riddles Wisely Expounded" is the most recent text to show the influence of the Symphosian riddling tradition—the content is drawn directly from it and its final development marks the end of this tradition of Creation Riddles. But it is not a dead end in itself. Its riddles continue on. They

mix and match, as it were, with each other and with folk-tale riddles in a group of riddle ballads concerned not with Creation and the nature of things, but rather with love and matrimony.

The four chapters of the thesis describe an arc, beginning with Symphosius' adaptation of folk and traditional riddles[16] and ending, via their vernacularization in the *Exeter Book*, with their absorption into the ballad and folk tradition. The texts considered in this thesis offer us a unique opportunity: to study a series of riddles, spread over a period of more than a thousand years, in which the line of influence is unusually clear. Moreover, they are all linked by virtue of the fact that they each offer a view of the created world; an interpretation of its nature and of humanity's place within it.

In tracing this tradition, the present thesis attempts something new: to chart within a particular tradition the evolving nature of a riddlic idea. Such a project is closest to the work of both Bothwick and of Hill, who have variously attempted studies of the history of an individual riddle. But, where they each focus on a single riddle which remains essentially the same with only superficial alterations over the centuries, this thesis considers a riddlic idea so culturally significant that it evolves to reflect changing world views. So much so that, if we place texts from opposite ends of the arc, Symphosius' riddles and the ballad "Riddles Wisely Expounded", side by side their relationship would not be evident. However, I believe that in following the intervening stages the relationship is clear. Though I have used a literary methodology of close textual analysis, this project differs sharply from those undertaken by literary scholars like Orchard and Lapidge who have studied individual riddle texts or a group of riddle texts from a particular historical period as if they were static literary artefacts. Nor do I follow folklorists like Pavlovskis and Blauner who have produced wide-ranging surveys, nor even folklorists like Dundes and Maranda who have studied the social function of groups of riddles taken from a

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[16] C. and D. Ingemark "Teaching Ancient Folklore" in *The Classical Journal* 102 (2007), 279—89, 285. The article argues that "riddles were an important part of the oral traditions of antiquity" and suggests that Symphosius' collection draws on this oral tradition.

particular community—though I have benefited greatly from their work. On the contrary; this thesis attempts the study of Creation Riddles, within a sub-genre of the Riddle, the Symphosian Riddle. The riddlic idea at its heart is the paradox of Creation; Creation, "made manifold" as Aldhelm says,[17] which encompasses and unites all contraries.

Ancient Riddle Terms: *Aenigmata* and *Griphoi*

In order to understand Symphosius as an innovator in the Riddle genre, it is important to understand the riddling culture of the ancient world. Perhaps the best place to begin is with a consideration of the etymologies of the Greek and Latin words for "riddle" and their implications. The old Latin word for riddles, *scirpus*, "bulrush", is based on the analogy between the intricate trickery of riddles and the intricate patterns of woven baskets made from bulrushes. This analogy is also at the heart of one of the Greek words for "riddle", *griphos* (γρῖφος), which takes its meaning from the act of weaving, particularly the weaving of fishing baskets.[18]

A Latinized version of the word, usually *griphus*, is occasionally used by Latin authors. However, the more usual word for "riddle", the word used by Symphosius and adopted by medieval riddlers is the Greek-derived "*aenigma*". *Aenigma* came to mean "riddle" by virtue of the metaphor of darkness; a reference to the obscurity of riddles. This idea of darkness is so persistent that the King James Bible usually translates *αἴνιγμα/ aenigma* as "dark sayings". It is worth noting that Saint Paul does not say that we shall see God "through a glass, darkly" (1Cor. 13:12) but rather "*ἐν αἰνίγματι*": by means of, or in, riddles.[19]

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[17] Ald. *Enig.* 100.4, "varium fecit".
[18] This adds an extra aspect to *The Contest of Homer and Hesiod* and to the riddle which Homer fails to solve, resulting in his death. The riddle told by fishermen, is prompted by Homer's question about what they have caught in their nets and revolves around a word-play on catching.
[19] J. R. R. Tolkien is perhaps playing on this in his chapter title "Riddles in the Dark" from *The Hobbit*. The play is a rather neat one since Gollum and Bilbo are literally in the dark but also figuratively; neither is sure of the other's motives or situation.

Not so clear is whether these words were strictly synonymous or whether they refer to two strands of riddling; *griphos/ scirpus* on the one hand and *ainigma/ aenigma* on the other. Athenaeus' *The Dinner Guests* suggests that perhaps there were. He has Aemilianus the Grammarian, say:

ἀλλ' ἡμεῖς ζητήσωμεν πρότερον μὲν τίς ὁ ὅρος τοῦ γρίφου, τίνα δὲ Κλεοβουλίνη ἡ Λινδία προὔβαλλεν ἐν τοῖς αἰνίγμασιν (10. 69, 7)

(Let us, then, first ask what is the definition of the riddle [*griphos*]; but (we will not consider) what it was that Cleobulina of Lindus propounded in her riddles [*ainigmata*])[20]

Cleobulina's work does not survive so we are not in a position to compare the two. However, Athenaeus includes such a diverse range of literary and linguistic forms in his account of *griphoi* that it is hard to conjecture about the nature of the distinction. This is further complicated by the fact that Symphosius, by his own admission a writer of *aenigmata/ ainigmata*, reworks several riddles which Athenaeus counts as "*griphoi*".

It is possible, then, that the difference between *ainigmata* and *griphoi* is not one of form, but rather of context. Hesychius defines a *griphos* in terms of riddling at symposia and links the form to competitive drinking games and forfeits. This might suggest that *griphoi* were told as part of a more licentious kind of riddling, while *ainigmata* were more oracular and serious in tone. Such a suggestion must be tentative since Hesychius is our only source for this association between drinking games and *griphoi*. Moreover, according to Plutarch, both *griphoi* and *ainigmata* were told as part of the religious festival, the *Agrionia*:

...τοῦ δείπνου τέλος ἔχοντος, αἰνίγματα καὶ γρίφους ἀλλήλαις προβάλλουσιν, τοῦ μυστηρίου διδάσκοντος, ὅτι λόγῳ τε δεῖ χρῆσθαι παρὰ πότον θεωρίαν τινὰ καὶ μοῦσαν ἔχοντι καὶ λόγου τοιούτου τῇ μέθῃ

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[20] *Athenæus: The Deipnosophists*, C. Gulick, trans. (London, 1930), 531.

παρόντος ἀποκρύπτεται τό ἄγριον καὶ μανικόν, ὑπο τῶν Μουσῶν εὐμενῶς κατεχόμενον (Plut. *Sym*. 8. 1,171)

(...when their dinner is over, the female initiates quiz each other with riddles [*ainigmata*] and conundrums [*griphous*]. The meaning of this ritual is that when drinking we ought to engage in conversation that has something speculative, some instruction in it, and that when conversation like this accompanies indulgence in wine, the wild and manic element is hidden away, benevolently restrained by the Muses.)[21]

Nevertheless, when Plutarch is writing about riddling, not in the context of religious festivals of misrule but rather in the context of more sober expressions of the sacred such as oracles, he does tend to use the term *ainigmata* rather than *griphoi*.[22]

Whatever the distinction might be, it does not seem to have been universally observed and therefore cannot have been of marked importance. Over time, it seems to diminish further, especially in the Latin tradition. Gellius, one of the few late antique sources to comment on the Riddle genre, implies that by his lifetime, the distinction has been lost: "quae Graeci dicunt "aenigmata," hoc genus quidam ex nostris veteribus "scirpos" appellaverunt" ("[t]he kind of composition which the Greeks call "enigmas," some of our early writers called *scirpi*").[23] Gellius' comment not only fails to distinguish between *scirpi/ griphoi* and *aingimata/ aenigmata*, but may also hint that the word *scirpus* had become archaic—a further indication that the distinction was not significant. We might conclude that any distinction was more significant in the Greek tradition than the Roman since it is still meaningful for the Greek-speaking Athenaeus a hundred years after the Latin-

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[21] *Plutarch's Moralia* VIII, F. Babbitt, trans. (London, 1961), 111.

[22] Similarly, in Christian religious writings, the words *ainigma* and *aenigma* are used, especially in the Bible and Augustine's *De Trinitate*, but not *griphos* or *scripus*.

[23] "The kind of composition which the Greeks call "enigmas," some of our early writers called *scirpi*." *The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius*, J. Rolfe, ed and trans. (London, 1927—8), 382—3.

speaking Gellius. Symphosius *was* conversant with Greek tradition[24] but there is not sufficient evidence to conclude much from the fact that Symphosius designates his riddles as *aenigmata*. Nevertheless, it is interesting that though Symphosius dismisses his riddles as works improvised on a whim, he chooses to give them what appears to have been the more serious name of *"aenigmata"*, where the contemporary Ausonius designates his work as a *"griphus"*.

Riddles in Antiquity: Athenaeus' Riddle Types

The substantial body of riddle texts that survives is a fraction of those composed in antiquity and late antiquity—perhaps this high rate of attrition is in part because later periods have not valued the Riddle enough to preserve such texts. Apuleius claims to have written riddles[25] and Athenaeus cites a wealth of now-vanished works. But much ancient riddling was probably never written down at all. The association between riddling and symposiac modes of speech suggests a strong oral riddle tradition, a suggestion confirmed by the assumption in writers such as Aristophanes that audiences will be familiar with particular riddles.[26] Even with the high rate of attrition, the extant riddle literature is considerable. There are riddles in the Old Testament and Paul discusses the notion that we see God in riddles in the New Testament.[27] In the Greek tradition, there is the famous riddle of the Sphinx (the basis of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*), the riddle contest in *The Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, and the *Elektra* plays of Euripides and Sophocles. The *Greek Anthology*

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[24] He constructs Greek/Latin bilingual puns in the *Aenigmata* and shows a preference for Greek over Roman traditional riddles and for Greek over Roman myths. For example, while he often draws on the mythic matrix surrounding the foundation of the Greek people concerning Prometheus, Deucalion and Hellen, he shows no interest in foundation stories of Rome concerning Romulus and Remus. Similarly, he draws on the *Iliad* but not the *Aeneid*.

[25] The word he uses for riddle is "griphus", an unusual loan word from Greek. (Apul. *Flor.* 9).

[26] For a discussion of Aristophanes' play on a particular riddle in *Wasps*, see 92—6.

[27] The most prominent of these are Samson's Riddle and the writing on the wall deciphered by Daniel. Interestingly, Thatcher argues for a culture of riddling in the Bible. He claims that much of Jesus' ministry may be understood in terms of riddles since Jesus teaches through dialogue; questions and answers and speaks in riddlic modes: his parables, metaphors and puns are all similar to the language of riddling. Moreover, many of the most important Biblical conflicts are in the form of verbal duels. Neither Jesus nor the devil can force piety or impiety on humanity, but rather, must persuade mortals; Jesus most notably in the Sermon on the Mount, the devil, in the Garden of Eden. T. Thatcher *The Riddles of Jesus in John: a Study in Tradition and Folklore* (Atlanta, 2000).

preserves riddles, problems, and mathematical puzzles, Plutarch includes a series of riddles in his *The Dinner of the Seven Wise Men*, and Athenaeus devotes a large portion of Book 10 of *The Dinner Guests* to a discussion of riddles. In the Latin tradition there are riddles in Ovid's *Fasti* and Vergil's *Eclogues*. Writers as disparate as Plautus and Gellius tell riddles and Ausonius wrote a remarkable poem devoted to riddles on the number three. In addition, Aristotle, Plutarch, Gellius, Athenaeus, and Hesychius all wrote definitions of the Riddle of one kind or another. With such a body of theoretical material and of individual riddles to work from, it should be possible to form a relatively clear idea of the genre. However, because of lack of agreement between authors about the nature of riddles, and the absence of a common form, semantic structure, riddlic conceit, content, or mood in the riddles they cite, this material raises more questions than it answers.

Of the extant "riddle texts" the most illuminating is Athenaeus' discussion in Book 10 of *The Dinner Guests*, the most comprehensive work on the genre surviving from late antiquity. Rather than giving a single definition of the Riddle, it lists several different sorts of riddling, all of which are illustrated with examples. Although Athenaeus turns his attention specifically to *griphoi*, several factors, especially Symphosius' reworking of traditional riddles mentioned by Athenaeus, suggest that his understanding of the riddle genre is relevant to a reading of Symphosius.[28]

The discussion in *The Dinner Guests* purports to move from one riddle type to the next, progressing from simpler forms of riddling to more complex ones. But, disappointingly, Athenaeus provides very little analysis of the various features of these riddle types. Instead he has one of his characters, the host Larensis,[29] list examples grouped together by subjective associations which are sometimes based, not on riddle type, but on their presence in a particular author or in the same text. It

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[28] Other factors which indicate the relevance of Athenaeus to Symphosius are the remarkable breadth of Symphosius' influences, and the dilution of the *aenigmata/ griphoi* distinction in Latin authors.

[29] P. Livius Larensis was an historical figure; a consul at Rome in the late second century contemporary with the setting of the feast. See P. E. Easterling, ed. *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature* (Cambridge, 1989), 122.

is not always clear which riddlic features match which riddle type. The situation is further complicated by Athenaeus' frequent digressions and the fact that many of the "riddle-types" appear to be represented more than once and at different points in the text. It must also be said that, at least for the modern reader, many of the riddles would not qualify as such. However despite these shortcomings, one may gain some impression of the qualities that Athenaeus regards as definitional by considering each riddle in relation to those placed on either side of it.

It seems to me that Athenaeus' riddles fall into five basic types. The first turns on the substitution or subtraction of letters or syllables. These are obviously the ancestors of the literary, rather that the folk, riddle and most are dependent on the literacy of the riddle's audience. Athenaeus cites as riddlic an episode in a play by Agathon in which an illiterate man spells out the name "Theseus" by having the letters described to him—an indication of the still tenuous nature of literacy in the ancient world which also helps to explain the significance of "spelling" riddles, so perplexing to modern audiences in cultures of almost universal literacy. Symphosius incorporates an element of spelling riddles in *Lapis* and *Porcus* where letters are subtracted from the *lemmata* to reveal the answers to the secondary puzzle within the main riddle (*lapis/apis* and *porcus/orcus*). But this is certainly not a substantial aspect of Symphosius' riddling.[30] Perhaps more interestingly, Athenaeus quotes riddles made by combining the first and last syllables of Homeric lines to form the names of various objects. These are reminiscent of several of the texts included with Symphosius' riddles in the *Codex Salmasianus* which modern scholars have not identified as riddles, though perhaps Athenaeus' comments give grounds for wondering whether they might have been riddlic to a late antique mentality.

The second riddle type in Athenaeus is what I term the "Metaphorical Riddle". Of course, almost all riddles employ metaphor—indeed the great riddle scholar Archer Taylor makes this central in his definition of a riddle; "the true

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[30] In fact it becomes more common amongst the riddlers of early England such as Tatwine and Eusebius.

riddle...compares an object to another entirely different object".[31]   In general, it is
true to say that riddles work by encouraging the reader to look for the answer in the
wrong place, in effect, the riddle question appears paradoxical because we *misread*
the metaphor.[32]   However, the Metaphorical Riddle deserves this name because it is
constructed from a single, extended (in some cases overly florid) metaphor which
makes up the entirety of the riddle.   The Metaphorical Riddle depends for its
obscurity on the fact that this metaphor is misleadingly uncontextualized.   The type
encompasses what Athenaeus terms the "riddles of Pythagoras" (essentially gnomic
verses), charms, proverbs, oracular utterances, and other kinds of wisdom literature.
It also includes the riddles whose overblown and ridiculously tenuous metaphors
Aristotle instances in support of his claim that the overuse of metaphors leads, not to
poetry, but to riddles, *Poetics* (22. 1458a, 20—25).   These riddles are also derided
by Athenaeus who quotes a lengthy passage from Antiphanes' *Amorous* in which the
speaker's elaborate metaphorical descriptions are mocked by an interlocutor who
advises that he use plain words instead![33]   Symphosius' *Navis, Ericius, Pons,
Balneum* all fit this category, although Symphosius more usually employs a range of
different and often only implied metaphors rather than a single, extended, explicit
one.   However, the type becomes very popular amongst his literary descendants.   In
early England, in the context of a vernacular poetic tradition rich with kennings in
which poets heap metaphors upon each other, this becomes the obvious riddle type.
Most of the *Exeter Book* riddles could be said to belong to it.

Interestingly, Athenaeus includes in this group a riddle which he attributes to
Theognis, but which becomes traditional and is finally reworked by Symphosius:[34]

ἤδη γάρ με κέκληκε θαλάσσιος οἴκαδε νεκρός
τεθνηκὼς ζωῷ φθεγγόμενος στόματι ((Athen. 10.85, 3—4)

[31] A. Dundes and R. Georges, (1963). "Toward a Structural Definition of the Riddle" in *Journal of American Folklore* 76: 111—118, 113.
[32] W. Pepicello and T. Green *The Language of Riddles: New Perspectives* (Columbus, 1984)
[33] C. Gulick, trans., 534—537.
[34] See E. Borthwick "The Riddle of the Tortoise and the Lyre" in *Music and Letters* 51 (1970), 373—387.

(For already the corpse from the sea summons me home, which
though dead it be, speaks with living tongue.)[35]

Athenaeus tells us that the answer is "a cockle-shell used as a horn". The riddle uses
two related and interconnected riddlic strategies; the first is the extended metaphor
which compares the shell to a corpse and the second is the apparent contradiction
that a dead creature speaks with a "living" voice. Symphosius' version, *Testudo*,
(Tortoise) employs only the second strategy[36] so that his version is no longer an
instance of the riddle type Athenaeus is discussing. Rather it becomes what
folklorists now term an Oppositional Riddle, the third type of riddle discussed by
Athenaeus.[37]

Tarda, gradu lento, specioso praedita dorso;
†docta quidem studio†, sed saevo prodita fato,
viva nihil dixi, quae sic modo mortua canto. (Symp. 20.1—3)

Deliberate, with slow step, gifted with a splendid back,
[...], but betrayed by cruel fate,
Living I said nothing, as soon as I die I sing in this way.

These attributes appear to be paradoxical since they are framed in terms which are in
strict contradiction. In riddles of this type the contradiction is always in the words
not the fact. That is to say, the riddle appears to express a paradox, but its solution
reveals it to be an ordinary, everyday feature of the world. Such riddles exemplify
another Aristotelian riddle definition: "*αἰνίγματός τε γὰρ ἰδέα αὕτη ἐστί, τὸ λέγοντα
ὑπάρχοντα ἀδύνατα συνάψαι*" (*Poet.* 22, 25—6) ("[t]he essence of a riddle consists in

[35] C. Gulick, trans., 572—3.
[36] As a description of a tortoise, not a cockle shell, naturally.
[37] For more on Oppositional Riddles, see R. Georges and M. Jones *Folkloristics* (Bloomington,
1995), 100.

describing a fact by an impossible combination of words.").[38] Athenaeus returns to this type of riddle later in the discussion where he describes it as:

ἀρχαιότατις δ' ἐστὶ λογικὸς γρῖφις καὶ τῆς τοῦ γριφεύειν·φύσεως οἰκειότατος (Athen. 10. 453)

(A very ancient kind of riddle, and one that is most closely related to the true nature of the riddle, has to do with logical concepts.)[39]

The Metaphorical type includes a range of riddles whose semantic structures are differently categorized by modern folklorists. It includes Homer's riddle from *The Contest of Homer and Hesiod* and reworked by Symphosius in *Pediculus*; "ὅσσ' ἕλομεν λιπόμεσθα, ὅσ' οὐχ ἕλομεν φερόμεσθα" (*Cert.* 325) ("The ones we caught we left behind, the ones we missed we carry").[40] This riddle employs an apparently straightforward contradiction; how can anyone bring home what they did not catch? The answer, "lice", reveals that the riddle was framed so as to encourage us to assume that the speaker did not already possess whatever it was they simultaneously "left behind" but still "carry". Athenaeus gives an example which runs, "τί ταὐτὸν ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ ἐν θαλάττῃ" (Athen. 10. 453 b) ("What is the same in the sky, on the earth, and in the sea?")[41] The solution to this riddle can be one of a number of animals, since, as Gulick explains, the bear is "the Great and Little Bear, also the bear-crab" the snake is the "constellation Serpens, also a kind of fish, Ophidium" and the eagle is the "constellation Aquila, also *Myliobatis aquila*, a kind of ray".[42] But the conundrum derives from the fact that the riddle's audience is encouraged to try to think of a single beast found in the sky, on land and in the sea, when in fact the solution involves different entities, all with the same name. This riddle type is given an especially sophisticated expression in Symphosius' *Taurus*.[43]

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[38] *Aristotle: The Poetics*, W. H. Fyfe, trans. (Cambridge, MS., 1932), 85.
[39] C. Gulick, trans., 552—5.
[40] *Homeric Hymn, Homeric Apocrypha, the Lives of Homer*, M. West, trans. (Harvard, 2007), 351.
[41] C. Gulick, trans., 555.
[42] Ibid., 555.
[43] See discussion below, 110—12.

Athenaeus' final riddle types seem, to a modern sensibility, especially out of place in a catalogue of riddles. The fourth type, which Athenaeus claims were associated with performers such as Aristonymus the harp-virtuoso and Cleon the mime actor, turn on a central pun more like a joke than a riddle. In the fifth type contestants attempt to best each other with the breadth of their knowledge of poetry. Unlike those previously discussed, these "riddles" cannot be transformed into a poetic genre because they are too firmly rooted in the contest situation; they make no sense outside an agonistic wit-combat setting. Usually, as Taylor and Auden point out, riddle contests either "appeal to a process of thought" or rely on "an inventory of knowledge".[44] But both seem applicable in the case of this final riddle type. One would expect a "cutting contest" around memorized bodies of poetry would simply require "an inventory of knowledge". However, in a culture which still retained certain values associated with orality, the contest is an educational exercise which develops habits of thoughtful and discerning engagement with the material. Athenaeus gives several examples of the different forms such riddling might take. One riddler might recite one line of poetry and the other respond with the next line. A riddler might recite a passage which illustrates a particular author's opinion on a subject and the other respond with an example from another writer who writes to the same effect on the subject. The contests might also give displays of metrical agility in which all "riddle" solutions had to be offered in a pre-determined metrical pattern. This sort of contest may also involve naming everything in a particular category; for example, all the Trojan leaders whose names start with a particular letter. Although Symphosius does not directly engage in this kind of riddling, the breadth of literary knowledge required to follow the intricate twists of his riddles is evidence of the same kind of literary culture.

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[44] P. Taylor and W. H. Auden *The Elder Edda: a Selection* (London, 1973), 21. Taylor and Auden make this point in order to differentiate riddles in general from the Germanic tradition of riddling which does require its riddle-readers to demonstrate "an inventory of knowledge".

A similar culture of riddling may also have existed as the backdrop to Symphosius' successors. Of course, most extant Germanic riddling[45] post-dates our earliest English riddler, Aldhelm, and is therefore a problematic model for reconstructing the anterior tradition he inherited. However, Germanic literature gives evidence of a highly conservative oral poetic tradition, as illustrated in the oral-formulaic phrase "warriors among the folk", which persists as follows:

> ...*firar í folk* "warriors among the folk," which appears in "The Treachery of Asmund," occurs in the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* (*fireo in folche*) and in the Old English riddles (*firum on folce*), although the forms in which these poems appear suggests that their dates of composition span half a millennium.[46]

Moreover the love of kennings (described by Cassidy and Ringler as "riddles in embryo")[47] in Germanic tradition and the proliferation of riddling in Germanic literature across Europe, suggests a deeply-rooted, long-held love of riddling, the echoes of which reverberate in our earliest extant texts. Thus, it is worth noting that riddle contests similar to the "cutting contests" described in Athenaeus are found in the *Edda*. Here the riddle-readers must name things or number geographic features (such as rivers or stars).[48] In the *Alvíssmál*, for example, Þórr requires his opponent, Alvíss, to tell him the different names used among the various "races"—men, giants, gods, elves, dwarves—for the earth, the heavens, the moon, the sun, the clouds, the wind, the calm, the sea, fire, wood, night, barley, and ale. The list of things to be named by Alvíss forms a catalogue of the universe, not unlike the encyclopaedic *Symphosii Scholastici Aenigmata*.

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[45] The *Edda* are the richest source.
[46] P. Taylor and W. H. Auden *The Elder Edda: A Selection* (London, 1973), 14.
[47] F. Cassidy and R. Ringler, eds. *Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader* (New York, 1971)
[48] P. Taylor and W. H. Auden, 21.

This type of riddling is also similar to some of the riddles in Plutarch's *The Dinner of the Seven Wise Men*. Plutarch's riddles are classed as Superlative Riddles.[49] In contrast to Symphosius' enumeration of the diversity of concrete phenomena, Plutarch offers a conceptual framework for the world and even the conditions of moral existence. Plutarch's riddles, like many Superlative Riddles, become almost a series of maxims, a kind of catechism:

> τί πρεσβύτατον; χρόνος.
> τί μέγιστον; κόσμος
> τί σοφώτατον; ἀλήθεια
> τί κάλλιστον; φῶς
> τί κοινότατον; θάνατος
> τί ὠφελιμώτατον; θεός
> τί βλαβερώτατον; δαίμων
> τί ῥωμαλεώτατον; τύχη
> τί ῥᾷστον; ἡδύ

> (What is the oldest thing? Time.
> What is the greatest? The Universe.
> What is the wisest? Truth.
> What is the most beautiful? Light.
> What is the most common? Death.
> What is the most helpful? God.
> What is the most harmful? An evil spirit.
> What is the strongest? Fortune.
> What is the easiest? Pleasure.)[50]

Plutarch has his character, Neiloxenus the *episkopos*, give these riddle pre-eminence over other riddle types, because they are, in his opinion, more cultivated and

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[49] For a further discussion of Superlative Riddles, see 185.
[50] F. Babbitt, trans., 384—387. Interestingly, it would also be possible to class such riddles as "Superlative" riddles, a category which is represented elsewhere, as we have seen, in Athenaeus.

civilized. There are also obvious parallels to be drawn with the *Cotton Maxims* of Anglo-Saxon England.

Even from this brief analysis it is clear that some of the verbal manoeuvres Athenaeus describes would no longer be regarded as riddles, especially the so-called "cutting contest". However, his discussion of the riddle types is invaluable for understanding the nature of riddling in the ancient world and into the medieval. Athenaeus' discussion, in effect a normative survey, is especially important in giving us a point of reference for understanding so complex and iconoclastic a riddler as Symphosius, both his immersion in contemporary riddle culture and his innovative divergences from it.

The Form of Symphosius' Riddles: Martial's Saturnalian Epigrams

Symphosius did not invent the literary form of his riddles; rather his originality lies in adapting a pre-existing form, in this case from Martial's Saturnalian epigrams. The "literary closeness of [Martial's] *Xenia* (and the *Apophoreta*) to Symphosius' riddles"[51] has been much remarked. Like Symphosius' riddles, the epigrams in the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* contain witty descriptions of everyday things, each obfuscated by the paradoxical description but revealed in the lemma. Both Martial and Symphosius use a fixed number of lines, the former distiches, the latter tristiches. Further, since the epigrams in the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta* describe gifts given at the Saturnalia, they also share their festive context with Symphosius' riddles.[52] Martial explains his composition of the epigrams by remarking in the introductory poem of the *Apophoreta*:

> ...quid agam potius madidis, Saturne, diebus,
> quos tibi pro caelo filius ipse dedit? (Mart. 14.1, 9—10)

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[51] F. Grewing, 38.

[52] The Saturnalian context and Martial's ready wit makes these an obvious model in some ways, though in others the choice is rather perplexing. The lemmatical solutions are an example of one of the stranger formal aspects of the riddles. Full a fuller discussion of Symphosius' use of this anomalous feature, see 91—5.

(...what else am I to do, Saturn, on the unsober days your son himself gave you in exchange for Heaven?)[53]

Leary notes that during the time of the Saturnalia it was "customary for the mottoes attached to gifts distributed at dinner to contain riddles".[54] Suetonius attests to this custom, though he does not describe the labels as "riddles". Instead, he tells us that the Emperor Augustus had a fondness for labelling the gifts "titulis obscuris et ambiguis" (Suet. *Aug.* 75) ("with obscure and ambiguous labels"); that is to say, the titles were playfully misleading about the gifts they accompanied.

There are also strong similarities between Symphosius' *Praefatio* and Martial's introductory poem in the *Apophoreta*. Both start by referring to the year's cyclic return to the time of the Saturnalia and then give details of the license that characterized the festival observances. Both take the self-deprecating stance of dismissing their own work and excusing their professed "failings" by attributing them to the excesses of the season. Symphosius' *Praefatio* also follows Martial's conceit, introduced in the *Xenia*, that the epigrams themselves might be given as a Saturnalian present. Symphosius tells us that he invents his riddles by way of compensating for having arrived at the feast empty-handed:

Ast ego, ne solus foede tacuisse viderer,
qui nihil adtuleram mecum quod dicere possem,
hos versus feci subito (*Prae.* 13—5)

(But I, not to seem the only one to be disgracefully silent,
Who had brought nothing with me which I was able to say,
I improvised these verses)

[53] *Martial: Epigrams* II, W. Ker, trans. (London, 1978), 441.
[54] T. J. Leary *Martial Book XIV* (London, 1996), 58.

If Martial is anything to judge by, such verses would be considered a poor substitute for material goods. He jokes:

Haec licet hospitibus pro munere disticha mittas,

si tibi tam rarus quam mihi nummus erit . (Mart. 13.3, 5—6)

(These distiches you can send to your guest instead of a gift, if a coin shall be as rare with you as with me.).[55]

There are also parallels in the substance of Symphosius' and Martial's collections. Many of Martial's epigrams take subjects which Symphosius was later to treat in his own work. Some of Symphosius' riddles seem to refer explicitly to Martial.[56] Indeed, Glorie claims that Symphosius' *Beta* and *Grus* are based on *Betae* (13) and *Grues* (75) from the *Xenia*, and that Symphosius' *Tessera*, *Strigilis Aenea*, *Lanterna* and *Spongia* allude to *Turricula* (16), *Strigiles* (51), *Lanterna Cornea* (61), and *Spongea* (144) from the *Apophoreta*.[57]

However, ultimately, Symphosius' vision is more encompassing than Martial's. The sheer quantity and scope of the riddles that make up the *Symphosii Scholastici Aenigmata* is such as to provide readers with a virtual taxonomy of the material world. Symphosius has ordered his topics to reveal at every turn new and unexpected insights into familiar things.[58] The difference between the two authors is most apparent in their respective authorial voices. In the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*, Martial describes his subjects from a distinctive dry, witty, self-deprecating third person stance. The audience is encouraged to participate in his urbane, occasionally

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[55] W. Ker, trans., 393.

[56] Interestingly, in arguing for his "literal interpretation" of *Beta*, Rehnan claims that Symphosius is using a technique which may be found, among other places, in Martial. R. Rehnan "Symphosius 41.1: A Literal Interpretation" in *Classical Quarterly* 31 (1981), 471.

[57] *Variae Collectiones Aenigmatum Merovingicae Aetatis*, F. Glorie ed., *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina,* 133—133a (Turnholt, 1968), 862.

[58] In fact, it was clearly part of Martial's intention *not* to write an overly inter-dependent collection; he admits as much himself in his repeated suggestion that his readers skip over those epigrams which do not interest them. (Mart. 13.3, 7—8; 14.2, 1—4)

acerbic even outrageous, view of the world. By contrast, each of Symphosius' riddles describes itself in its own autonomous voice, thereby encouraging the audience to take on a series of Other perspectives.

The Function of Riddles

By virtue of the fact that riddles are framed so as to conceal the obvious and draw out the atypical and anomalous, they inevitably have the effect of revealing their subjects in a new light; whether that turns out to be comic, disconcerting, distressing, or enlightening depends on the particular riddle. Riddle readers revise their preconceptions in light of the riddle's solution. While this aspect of riddling has been lost to modern Western cultures, the ancient and medieval worlds had an appreciation of, and indeed greatly prized, the "eureka moment" that accompanies satisfactory resolution of a riddlic paradox. Even during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, when riddling had disappeared from high literate culture, they were still valued, and widely circulated in an oral, folk tradition of ballad narratives whose heroes and heroines were marked by their "riddle wit".

In ancient cultures, riddles were felt to be an appropriate medium for the revelation of divine mysteries. Thus Plutarch, who had a pronounced interest in riddles and eventually became a priest of the Oracle at Delphi, writes of the Orphic Mysteries that the greatest truth is to be found in their most enigmatic aspects:

> ὅσῳ γὰρ μᾶλλον παράδοξόν ἐστι καὶ τερατῶδες τὸ αἴνιγμα, τοσούτῳ
> μᾶλλον ἔοικε διαμαρτύρεσθαι μὴ τοῖς αὐτόθεν λεγομένοις πιστεύειν, ἀλλὰ
> τὰ λεληθότα περιεργάζεσθαι... (E. Del. 8—16)

> (For just in proportion as the enigma is more paradoxical and
> wonderful, so does he [Orpheus] warn us to distrust the appearance,
> and seek for the hidden meaning...)[59]

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[59] Quoted and translated in G. R. S. Mead *Orpheus* (London, 1896), 40.

In the Old Testament prophets speak in riddles (*Eze* 17:2) and so does God Himself (*Num.* 12:8). So it is not surprising that this notion—that the Riddle is the proper medium for approaching the spiritual realm—dominates medieval Christianity, as in Isidore of Seville's definition: "aenigma enim est obscura similitudo, per quam monetur homo ut cor suum acuat, et ad interiora intelligenda confugiat" (Isa. *De Fide* 2.22, 2) ("[a] riddle is an obscure analogy through which one is warned to sharpen wits and turn to those inner things which are to be grasped").[60]

Throughout the world, throughout time, riddles have been put to many different purposes—their function is another area of perennial scholarly debate especially amongst folklorists—but it is their ability to take an inquirer from puzzlement to insight which is felt to reproduce the experience of divine revelation. Symphosius, Aldhelm, the *Exeter Book* poet(s), and the Child Ballad singers all, in their own ways, use riddles to probe the nature of things. In the case of the Child Ballads, the added elements of narrative and a fictional riddle contest, give the audience a degree of distance, but, in essence, the riddles' function is the same. All four "texts" considered in this thesis, Symphosius' *Aenigmata*, Aldhelm's *De Creatura*, the "Creation Riddles" of the *Exeter Book* and the ballad "Riddles Wisely Expounded", have a religious context. Symphosius sets his riddles at the feast of the Saturnalia, Aldhelm declares the purpose of his riddles to be the exploration of the hidden secrets of God (Ald. *præ.* 7), *Riddles 40* and *66* of the *Exeter Book* chart the relationship between God and Creation,[61] and "Riddles Wisely Expounded" preserves a riddle contest between a young girl and the Devil which re-enacts and reverses the outcome of the earlier contest between Eve and Lucifer in the Garden of Eden.

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[60] Quoted and translated in V. Law *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge, 1995), 24.

[61] *Riddle 93*, the third Creation Riddle in the *Exeter Book*, is so fragmentary that it is impossible to guess what kind of contextualization it may once have had.

Each of these four texts uses the Riddle to engage with the religious discourses of their time and with the contemporary conception of the Divine. Because the historical and cultural context for each of these riddle texts is widely different, the forms and means of expression also differ. For Symphosius, who was probably an educated pagan writing in an increasingly intolerant Christianized Roman Empire sometime around the beginning of the fifth century CE, the riddles may be seen as a plea for cultural plurality. In their allusions and intertextuality they simultaneously preserve the old pagan literature of the Classical world (now at risk of being lost or forgotten), and argue that this Classical tradition is not necessarily in conflict with the new Christian religion. For Aldhelm, the clergyman, writing some three centuries later at the beginning of the eighth century CE, the problem is exactly opposite. His England is only a generation or two away from paganism. His riddles adopt some of the refinements of pagan literature in the service of religious instruction. In the case of the *Exeter Book* the *exact* circumstances of their composition are unknown; however, it is unlikely that all the riddles were composed by the same person or at the same time, so we cannot speak of an agenda which holds for the entire collection.[62] In the specific instances of *Riddles 40, 66,* and *93* the concern appears to be seeing God in the everyday experiences of the Anglo-Saxon world. Finally, "Riddles Wisely Expounded", like all English and Scottish folk ballads, and arguably, the folk tradition as a whole, reflects a heterodox amalgamation of pagan, Christian, and folk-Christian beliefs and legends, expressive of the often-subversive folk culture of the ballad singers.

Conclusion

The present thesis is a study of the treatment of a specific riddle subject (Creation) in a specific riddling tradition (the Symphosian Riddle) over a period of more than a thousand years. Because each text is deeply influenced by its predecessor, the variations and innovations of each author are particularly significant in illustrating cultural shifts and reflecting changing conceptions of Creation and humanity's place

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[62] C. Williamson *A Feast of Creatures: Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Songs* (London, 1983), 4—5.

in it. Creation is imagined as orchestrated or random, benevolent or indifferent, abundant or deficient. For Symphosius, Creation exists in a hundred interrelated facets, it is abundantly pluralistic. For Aldhelm, who describes Creation in a single poem structured around a series of oppositions, it is the ordered *magnus opus* of omniscient and omnipotent God. For the *Exeter Book* poet(s)—especially the *Riddle 40* poet who reproduces Aldhelm's form but allows his sumptuous evocation of detail to disrupt Aldhelm's dichotomies—it is teeming, abundant with life of all kinds. And for the singers of "Riddles Wisely Expounded", who imagine Creation as the subject of a riddle contest between a young girl and the devil, the created world is poised between good and evil, full of snares for the unwary which may only be overcome with virtue and riddle wit.

Chapter One: Part I

Translation and Commentary
of the *Symphosii*[1] *Scholastici Aenigmata*

Words, words. They're all we have to go on.

———*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* 1.348

This translation of the *Symphosii Scholastici Aenigmata* is made from Bergamin's thorough and meticulous 2005 edition of the text.[2] In line with recent philological thinking, I follow her preference for a more conservative approach than that of Shackleton Bailey in his 1982 edition. But in a few difficult cases I have accepted Shackleton Bailey's conjecture or simply marked the text as corrupt and not attempted a translation (see below). Bergamin's textual conservatism epitomizes the ideology of a small group of Italian Symphosius scholars, including Spallone, Murru, Vitale, and particularly Guarducci,[3] who have produced some of the most insightful and influential work on Symphosius in recent times. Their approach does not deny the losses, corruptions, and interpolations inevitable in the process of textual transmission; on the contrary, much of their work

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[1] Like many Italian scholars, Bergamin prefers "Symposius" to "Symphosius". However I have used the latter spelling throughout as it is the more usual among English-speaking scholars.

[2] For a fuller discussion of Bergamin's use of the manuscript tradition, see the note on the texts, viii—ix.

[3] See M. Spallone "Tradizioni Insulari e Letteratura Scolastica: Il ms Angelicanus 1515 e Gli Aenigmata di Simposio" in *Studi Classici e Orientali* 25 (1985), 185—228, F. Murru, "Aenigmata Symphosii ou Aenigmata Symposii?" in *Eos*, 67 (1980), 155—58, M. Vitale "Gli Enigma di Simposio e le Citazioni dei Grammatici" in *Studi e Ricerche dell'Istituto di Civiltà Classica Cristiana e Medievale. Facoltà di Magistero. Genova* 7 (1986), 201—17, M. Guarducci "La Chicciola Cristiana" in *Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica*, 119 (1991), 447—56.

is devoted to the rigorous assessment of manuscript evidence. But they recognize that with only the evidence of the text to go on, and without other contemporary extant riddle collections for comparison, extensive scholarly textual emendation runs a high risk of writing preconceptions into the text.

Problems of Translation and Riddle Translation

Since antiquity,[4] translation methodology has been the topic of fierce debate. In the mid-twentieth century translation theory, the questioning and refining of ideas about how to achieve equivalence between texts, has become an area of academic inquiry in its own right. Nord and Sparrow write:

> The concept of equivalence has been questioned ever since it was first established. From Nida's formulation of "dynamic equivalence" (Nida 1964) it is a long and tortuous path via Koller's specification of denotative, connotative, text-normative, pragmatic and formal equivalence (1979: 187ff., cf. also Koller 1995) to Neubert's "text-bound equivalence" (1984: 68 and 1986: 87ff.), which the translator constantly has to strive after and which may compensate for non-equivalent translations on lower ranks (e.g. at the level of words and phrases).[5]

Of course, some of these approaches are not suitable for a scholarly translation, such as the one I offer here, whose purpose—to support a close literary and cultural academic study of Symphosius' riddles—necessarily dictates close, literal translation. Such a translation is, to use Newmark's phrase, "a means not an end", an aid to understanding, not a literary work in its own right.[6] So, for example, a

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[4] Cicero and Horace both discuss translation. However, in Western Europe the driving force of translation methodology has been the dissemination of Christianity. The most influential translators have been Biblical scholars such as Saint Jerome. For a fuller discussion, see chapter three.
[5] C. Nord and P. Sparrow *Text Analysis in Translation: Theory, Methodology, and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-Oriented Text Analysis* (Amsterdam, 2005)
[6] P. Newmark *About Translation* (Bristol, 1991), 1—15.

translation in which equivalence is achieved through cultural "transplantation"[7] is not appropriate for an academic audience seeking to understand the culture of the source text.[8] As the projected audience for my translation is an academic readership, my approach has been to translate as literally as possible and, in order to ensure that the reader has the requisite information and understanding of cultural nuance, my practise has been to provide detailed notes on any point which might be obscure.

Translating riddles presents its own particular problems, which is not surprising given that modern western culture does not value riddles as a literary or high culture form. Such work as exists on riddle translation has been done by scholars studying riddles (Bantu or Shona riddles, for example) which, because of their linguistic structures or cultural specificity, "cannot be translated into English".[9] However, because of the close linguistic relationship between English and Latin, and the cultural continuities between the Late Roman Empire and the modern Western world, this work is not pertinent to translating Symphosius' riddles. But while this closeness does give us *entrée* into Symphosius' work, it also complicates the task of translation because it encourages us to overlook, or segue, the significant cultural differences. Symphosius' popularity in early England means that his work has been formative on the English literary tradition and yet, as this thesis demonstrates, both Roman culture in general and Symphosius' work in particular are profoundly foreign, especially in their attitudes to riddling. This "similarity in difference", makes the problems of translation less obvious, but not less important to address.

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[7] *A Dictionary of Translation Technology* defines the term as "referring to the replacement of details of the source culture in the original text by relevant target culture elements." S. Chan *A Dictionary of Translation Technology* (Hong Kong, 2006), 52.

[8] L. Venuti *The Translation Studies Reader* (New York, 2000), 68.

[9] E. Gwaravanda and D Masaka "Shona Reasoning Skills in Zimbabwe" in *Journal of Pan-African Studies* 2 (2008), 1—15, 3—4. For a fuller discussion of Bantu riddling, see P. Beuchat "Riddles in Bantu" in *the Study of Folklore* A. Dundes, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, 1969), 182—205. In fact there are many other fundamental differences, not least that riddle contests are adjudicated differently. In Shona riddling, the contest is lost when one contender can not think of any more riddles to ask. Gwaravanda and Masaka claim that because of this the winner is always "the one who is more knowledgeable", but for a scholar used to European riddling traditions, the more knowledgeable riddler would prove him/ herself by being able to answer more questions. This represents a fundamental ideological difference in the approach to riddles and in the kind of mental facilities which are valued.

The current notion that a "translator should make explicit in the translation what is implicit in the source text"[10] presents a particular difficulty for riddle translators because, under such a rubric, the aims of a translation are directly opposed to those of a riddle. If a translation should attempt to make meaning explicit, by contrast a riddle always attempts to obscure it. If a translation should provide its audience with an accurate understanding of the source text, by contrast a riddle always misdirects them to focus on a single, and inevitably incorrect, reading of its clues—often by means of exactly the kinds of cultural miscommunication which a translator seeks to clarify. If a translation should seek to illuminate (or elide) cultural ambiguities, a riddle often works through them. In short, the workings of riddles cut against much of current translation theory.

The aims of riddle translation must be appropriate to the nature of the genre. The Riddle is interactive, eliciting particular mental processes from its audience, so that a translation must retain this function while reproducing the imagery and overt meaning. The Riddle works through a central paradox, usually established (and enacted) by means of linguistic quirks and puns, so that a translation must preserve and convey this paradox rather than explain or clarify its ambiguities. With all of this in mind, I have tried to render an English version which translates the text as riddles, not as poetry. As I note above, I have scrupulously avoided finding cultural equivalents, since it is in understanding the original components of the central paradox, and the ideas and imagery associated with it, that we may achieve an insight into a particular riddle and the riddling culture that produced it.

Since the central riddle paradox is of paramount importance, it is crucial to represent it accurately. For example, there is a temptation to translate a line such as "Virtutes magnas de viribus affero parvis" (4.1), so as to reflect the play on *virtus*—I initially considered something like "I bestow great virtues by virtue of so little". However, this rendering displaces the word play and, more importantly, does not faithfully reflect Symphosius' construction of the paradox. My solution, "I bring

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[10] S. Chan, 52.

great merits with little strength", more accurately expresses the contrast between the smallness of the key and the greatness of its power to guard or expose the contents of the house—although it does not retain the neatness of Symphosius' turn of phrase. On a very few occasions, when I have felt that it did not obscure or distort Symphosius' meaning, I have allowed a slight displacement of the word play. Thus in *Mula*, I have translated "confusi generis, generi non apta propago" (37. 2) as "of mingled blood, a breed not fit to breed". The word play would have been more exactly preserved in a rendering such as, "of mingled blood, a blood not fit to breed" or "of mingled lineage, a lineage not fit to breed", but neither is true to Symphosius' sense or to the requirements of acceptable English. Since there is no English word which reflects Symphosius' use of *generis* and *generi*, the only other option is to exclude the word play altogether—as Ohl has in the rendering, "of mingled race, a breed unfit for progeny". All things considered, I have felt that the slight displacement of the word play is an acceptable compromise.

English Translations of Symphosius

Both made almost a century ago, the two currently used translations of Symphosius' riddles into English are by Peck (1912)[11] and Ohl (1928).[12] In addition, Wilbur recently translated a handful of Symphosius' riddles: *Clavis, Ericius, Funambulus, Tigris, Rosa, Viola, Tus, Pistillus, Anulus cum Gemma, Papver, Rana, Mus, Formica, Musca,* and *Pediculus.*[13] None of these translations uses Bergamin's edition of the Latin text and for this reason alone, there is a need for a new translation. The translations by Ohl and Peck represent opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of translation methodology. Ohl's translation, the only scholarly translation of Symphosius into English, is often literal to the point of retaining Symphosius' syntax, which is, at times, simply too convoluted to transfer

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[11] Unless otherwise stated, all Peck's translations are from E. Peck *The Hundred Riddles of Symphosius* (Vermont, 1912).

[12] Unless otherwise stated, all Ohl's translations are from R. Ohl *The Enigmas of Symphosius* (Philadelphia, 1928).

[13] The "translation" breaks with Symphosius' original order, as the list demonstrates. R. Wilbur "Some Riddles in Symphosius" in *The Hopkins Review* 1 (2008), 152—4.

successfully to an uninflected language. While this syntactic flexibility is an integral part of Symphosius' riddling technique, the riddles become taxing to read, and sometimes even incomprehensible, when transferred directly into English. By contrast, Peck chooses the perilous route of cultural transplantation. Both she and Wilbur have produced verse[14] translations which inevitably take a rather more liberal attitude to their source text, but neither is a serious attempt to produce a scholarly translation.

Let us turn first to these freer renderings. The translations of Peck and Wilbur, though occasionally ingenious, are symptomatic of a dismissive attitude toward Symphosius, which is quite widespread. Both render the riddles in a light-hearted, even comical, tone which perhaps reflects the view that riddles are inevitably light-hearted. They adopt rhythm and rhyme schemes, variously derived from English nursery rhymes and limericks, which are alien to Latin and which do not accurately reflect the sophistication of the *Aenigmata* or the great variety of tone and mood in the utterance of Symphosius' riddle creatures. For example, Symphosius' ant speaks in a manner which matches her patient, hard working nature:

Provida sum vitae, duro non pigra labore,

ipsa ferens umeris securae praemia brumae.

Nec gero magna simul, sed congero multa vicissim (22.1—3)

I have rendered it:

I am provident in the conduct of my life, not slothful in hard work,

Carrying on my shoulders the cost of a safe winter.

I do not carry much at once, but I amass much bit by bit.

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[14] Peck "translates" the quantitative metrics of Latin poetry into the stress-based metre and rhyme more usual in English poetry. Wilbur's translation employs rhyme but not metre.

Wilbur gives Symphosius' fussy ant a slack-jawed colloquialism which is entirely alien to her nature:

> I'm provident, and not an idle bum.
>
> I lug home food before the snowflakes come.
>
> Not in great loads, of course, but crumb by crumb.[15]

In general, Peck and Wilbur have been reductive in their rendering of the *Aenigmata*. In particular, they have resisted the grave tone which Symphosius sometimes adopts, replacing it with an unacceptable lightness, even in a riddle such as *Mulier quae geminos pariebat* where the woman recalls her near-mortal distress:

> Plus ego sustinui quam corpus debuit unum.
>
> Tres animas habui, quas omnes intus habebam:
>
> discessere duae, sed tertia paene peregit. (92.1—3)

I have rendered it:

> I have sustained more than one body should
>
> I had three souls, all of which I was holding within
>
> Two left, and the third nearly perished.

Peck's jingly version down plays the anguish of Symphosius' lines:

> More have I carried than from one was due;
>
> Three lives I had and all I nourished too;
>
> Now two are gone, the third came hardly through.

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[15] R. Wilbur, 154.

In fact, even Ohl's more academic version which renders the final line "a pair departed, but the third pretty nearly perished too" fails to convey the mother's plight. His jarring use of the phrase "pretty nearly" is not faithful to Symphosius' original and, to my mind, would be more apt to a P.G. Wodehouse character than a woman who had faced one of the severe trials of ancient life.[16] Such misrepresentations of tone occasionally result in the kind of gross cultural projection which is an ever-present risk for those adopting a methodology of cultural transplantation.[17] Thus Peck renders the ambiguous tombstone inscription, "Vita tamen superest morti post tempora vitae" (100.3) ("Nevertheless, life survives death after the time of life"), with the moralizing, anachronistic "Yet for the good there is an after-life instead."

Turning from Peck, we find that Ohl's translation, which has been standard in English, is equally problematic. On one or two points he appears to misunderstand Symphosius' thought. For example, he translates "falso...vento" (23.3) ("false wind") which probably refers to the breezes created by fly-flaps to keep flies off the food at banquets[18] as a "deceptive breeze" (cf. Peck's "fickle winds"). Though *falso* may mean "deceptive" that is not the meaning here. It is not that the wind tricks the fly, but rather that it is not a natural wind. In fact, Wilbur's "man-made breezes"[19] is the only translation to catch Symphosius' thought.

Ohl's translations are often designed to clarify Symphosius' riddlic ambiguity, as we see in his treatment of *Murra*.[20] Symphosius' uses *nascor* ("I am born"), a verb usually used of sentient creatures, to describe myrrh. This acts to blur the already-precarious distinction between the metamorphosing woman and the tree

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[16] In this context we might think of Medea's famous declaration that she would rather stand in the front line of battle than give birth once. (Eur. *Med.* 250—1) Current estimations put maternal mortality rates in the Roman Empire around 25 per 1,000. The IMR (Infant Mortality Rate) is thought to be around 300 per 1,000. D. Todman "Childbirth in Ancient Rome: From Traditional Folklore to Obstetrics" in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 47 (2007), 82—5, 84.

[17] Peck, of course, pre-dates the theoretical articulation of this idea, but her text, nevertheless, conforms roughly to its principles.

[18] Bergamin, 114.

[19] Wilbur, 154.

[20] For a full discussion of *Murra*, see 114—5.

to great riddlic affect. Ohl's translation, which renders "ex oculis fluxi sed nunc ex arbore nascor" (48.2) ("I have flowed from eyes, but now I spring from a tree") as "from human eyes I flowed, but now I start from a tree", does the opposite. He attempts to "explain" the riddle by translating "nascor" with the inaccurate and inelegant verb "start". Moreover, his translation of "ex oculis" as "from human eyes" imports the idea of humanness which Symphosius has deliberately excluded from the original. Perhaps most perplexingly, Ohl renders "laetus honor frondis" (48.3) ("[t]he happy glory of green boughs") with the nonsensical "the happy adornment of my leaf". This misunderstands Symphosius' careful opposition between the great value of myrrh resin and the shame from which, according to the myth, it was created. Having over-explained other points in the riddle, Ohl's translation of this phrase is enigmatic. One is constrained to ask, in what sense can the myrrh resin be a decoration for the leaves of the myrrh tree?

Even those scholars most dismissive of Symphosius agree that his turn of phrase is witty and dexterous, so Ohl's labourious, clumsy phrasing is a significant distorition of the original. A brief consideration of his rendering of *Pediculus* makes the point. First, the Greek version from which Symphosius works:

ὅσσ' ἕλομεν λιπόμεσθα, ὅσ' οὐχ ἕλομεν φερόμεσθα (*Cert.* 325)

(The ones we caught we left behind, the ones we missed we carry).[21]

Next Symphosius' text—already a "translation" of the Greek:

Est nova nostrarum cunctis captura ferarum:
ut si quid capias, hoc tu tibi ferre recuses,
et quod non capias, tecum tamen ipse reportes. (30.1—3)

My rendering:

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[21] Anon. *The Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, M. West, trans. (Harvard, 2007), 351.

There is a new kind of hunting of wild beasts for us all

That if you catch something, you refuse to carry it with you

And whatever you do not catch, you carry back with you.

This neat line of the Greek is metrically balanced; each half line reflecting the other. Symphosius' version also exhibits these traits: there is an internal rhyme on "nostrarum" and "ferarum" which marks the half lines, each of whose endings alliterate. The second and third lines mirror each other, with the second half line in each alliterating on "t" and concluding in a consonantal rhyme on "recuses" and "reportes". This stands in the greatest contrast to Ohl's rather clumsy:

There is a new kind of catching of our game for all, on condition that if you catch anything you may refuse to carry it off as your own and what you do not catch you may nonetheless bring back with you.

The combination of the profound with the profane is the mark of Symphosius' riddles and yet Ohl's translation seems to shy away from both ends of the spectrum. In *Strigilis aenea*, for example, he translates the riddle rather unclearly, apparently to obfuscate the sexual innuendo. But in so doing, he loses the effect of the riddle which is to suggest an obscene meaning only to disappoint with a solution which is entirely innocent. (The device appears again in a group of riddles from the *Exeter Book* known as the Obscene Riddles.)[22] Symphosius writes:

Robea curva capax, alienis humida guttis,

luminibus falsis auri mentita colorem,

dedita sudori, modico subcumbo labori. (88.1—3)

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[22] Like all Anglo-Saxon riddles, this group is influenced by Symphosius' riddling.

I have tried to render it so both the entitled solution and the subtext to remain evident:

> Red, curved, large, damp with foreign drops,
> Falsifying the colour of gold with deceitful flashes.
> Devoted to sweat, I succumb to a little toil.

Ohl's translation is not so much a riddle as a puzzle. Even with the entitled solution, it is a little difficult to read this as a description of a strigil:

> Ruddy, curved, capacious, bedewed with strange drop
> By means of metal mendacious set up for gold in improper streams
> Devoted to sweat, I succumb to trifling toil.

The greatest disservice modern scholars have done Symphosius is to take him at his word in the *praefatio* when he claims his works are "nugas" (*prae.* 7), but to disregard the "words", as it were, of the *Aenigmata* which show him to be a subtle, strange, comic and serious poet. My translation attempts to reflect the myriad moods of Symphosius' array of personalities and objects: the cheeky description of the strigil, the brazen fly, the mother's distress, the humble mouse, the raucous frog, the vicious wolf, the broken down soldier, and finally, the ominous tombstone which marks the end of the riddle collection—of its author and of us all.

So far, I have considered the typical problems that confront the translator of ancient material, and especially of riddles, into modern English. But sometimes, these are compounded by uncertainty about what the text actually means. This is the case with *Miles Podagricus*. In particular, there is much scholarly disagreement over the meaning of the "quinque pedes". In the following, I will review this debate and propose my own solution. Here is Symphosius' text:

Bellipotens olim, saevis metuendus in armis;

quinque pedes habui, quod numquam nemo negavit.

Nunc mihi vix duo sunt; inopem me copia fecit. (93.1—3)

I have translated it:

Once valiant in war, to be feared amongst savage weapons,

I had five feet, which none ever denied.

Now I have barely two; plenty has made me poor.

The most popular of various solutions, the one preferred by Bergamin, is that the "five feet" refers to the height requirement for soldiers in the Roman army.[23] However, this suggestion is problematic because the minimum height for soldiers in the Roman army was always greater than five feet. According to Vegetius, it was "VI pedum uel certe V et X unciarum" (Veg. *Mil.* 1.5), ("six feet or at least five feet and ten inches"). Even after the reduction of the height requirements in 367 CE, a "delectus" ("chosen man")[24] was required to be five foot seven inches tall (*CTh.* 7.13.3). Some editors, including Glorie, amend the riddle substituting "six feet" for the "five feet", but since the height requirement seems never to have been quite so tall, and was certainly less in Symphosius' time, this is also problematic. Shackleton-Bailey's suggested emendation, that "bis" ("twice") be added to the line, is even more drastic: "quinque pedes habui bis, numquam nemo negavit"[25] ("I have twice five feet, which no one has ever denied"). Shackleton Bailey takes the "twice five feet" to refer to the ten foot measure, the *decempeda*. The obvious objection to this (apart from the intrusion into the received text and the metrical disruption of the line[26]) is that the *decempeda* ruler is used in all kinds of surveying. It is not

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[23] M. Bergamin, 194.

[24] A "delectus" met the requirements for admission to the Roman army.

[25] Shackleton Bailey, 41.

[26] Bergamin claims "'quinque pedes habui, quod numquam nemo negavit' è la lezione prosodicamente corretta" ("'quinque pedes habui, quod numquam nemo negavit' is the metrically correct reading"). M. Bergamin, 194.

inherently military or associated with weaponry and therefore does not support the old soldier's claim to have been fearsome in battle.

I would like to propose the new solution that the "five feet" refers to the soldier's own two feet in addition to the three feet of frontage assigned to each soldier in close formation. These three feet, mentioned in both Latin and Greek late antique sources—Vegetius' "ternos pedes" (Veg. *Mil.* 3.14) and Polybios' "τρισὶ ποσὶ" (Polyb. 18.28)—were roughly the same width as a shield and represented both the area each soldier was required to defend and the space within which he must fight. In other words, it was the space which defined a soldier's duty and with which he, presumably, felt identified. My reading would fit with Symphosius' other "human riddles" in which the riddle subject is described as having, in addition to his own limbs, those of the objects associated with him (see note 79). It would also explain why the old soldier no longer has the five feet of which he boasts in the second line, a point not addressed by Bergamin's solution since even when he was shrunken with age the soldier must still have a height of at least five feet. If I am correct, there is true pathos in the soldier's lament "Nunc mihi vix duo sunt; inopem me copia fecit" (93.3) ("Now I have barely two; plenty has made me poor").

The phrase *inopem me copia fecit*, the only direct quotation in the whole of the *Aenigmata*, is used by Narcissus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Symphosius seems to be drawing a parallel between the way in which Narcissus' excellence (his beauty) spoils itself and the way the soldier's excellence (his military valour) destroys itself. In Narcissus' case, his beauty is such he becomes infatuated, staring at his reflection until he wastes away. In the soldier's case, using his strength at arms invites the injuries which incapacitate him.

I have translated "inopem" "poor" since this may refer to reduced resources both financial and physical, and also to the soldier's reduced spirits. Peck's rendering "Now scarce I've two, for wealth does not abide", fails to convey either the paradox or the pathos of the line. By choosing to "explain" the riddle in terms of material

goods or wealth, conveys only one aspect of Symphosius' meaning—the least interesting at that.

Symphosii Scholastici Aenigmata

Praefatio
[Haec quoque Symphosius de carmine lusit inepto;
sic tu, Sexte,[27] doces; sic te deliro magistro.]

Annua Saturni dum tempora festa redirent
perpetuo semper nobis sollemnia ludo,
post epulas laetas, post dulcia pocula mensae,
deliras inter vetulas puerosque[28] loquaces,
cum streperet late madidae facundia linguae,
tum verbosa cohors studio sermonis inepti
nescio quas passim magno de nomine nugas
est meditata diu; sed frivola multa locuta est.
Nec mediocre fuit magni certaminis instar,
ponere diverse vel solvere quaeque vicissim.
Ast ego, ne solus foede tacuisse viderer,
qui nihil adtuleram mecum quod dicere possem,
hos versus feci subito †discrimine vocis†.[29]
Insanos inter sanum non esse necesse est.
Da veniam, lector, quod non sapit ebria Musa.[30]

[These too did Symphosius playfully write in foolish verse,
Just as you teach, Sextus; so similarly I rave under your teaching.]

When the time of the feasts of Saturn was making its annual return—
always a ritual of endless fun for us—
after joyous banquets, after the sweet drinking cups at the table,
between revelling old women and prattling slaves,
when the eloquence of drunken tongues resounded far,
then the garrulous crowd in eagerness for foolish speech

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[27] It is not known to whom this refers.

[28] A feature of the Saturnalia is that slaves were given license.

[29] Many reconstructions of this line have been suggested; indeed, almost every edition reads it differently. None, however, is entirely satisfactory. See M. Bergamin, 4.

[30] Cf. Ausonius' declaration in the dedication of the *Griphus Ternarii Numeri* to Symmachus "Iniurium est de poeta male sobrio lectorem abstemium iudicare" ("It is outrageous that a strictly abstemious reader should sit in judgment on a poet a little drunk"). H. Waddell, trans. *The Wandering Scholars* (London, 1954), 37.

long pondered over I know not what frivolities under grand names
but frivolous were the many things said.
It was no ordinary matter, but resembled a mighty contest;
each one in turn to put various questions or to solve them.
But I, not to seem the only one to be disgracefully silent,
who had brought nothing with me which I was able to say,
I improvised these verses [...]
It is necessary not to be sober among the insane.
Be indulgent, reader, because the drunken Muse shows no sense.

1. Graphium

De summo planus sed non ego planus in imo.
Versor utrimque manu diverso et munere fungor:
altera pars revocat quidquid pars altera fecit.

Stylus
Flat on top, but not flat at the bottom.
I am turned both ways in the hand and am engaged in opposite functions:
One part undoes what the other has done.

2. Harundo

Dulcis amica dei,[31] ripae vicina profundae,
suave canens Musis, nigro perfusa colore,
nuntia sum linguae, digitis signata magistris.[32]

Reed
The dear sweetheart of a god, neighbour to steep banks,
Singing sweetly for the Muses, drenched with black,
I am the messenger of the tongue, pressed by expert fingers.

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[31] This refers to the story that when the nymph Syrinx was transformed into a reed to escape his amorous advances, the god Pan cut the reeds and made from them the first *syrinx* or pan-pipes. (Ov. *Met.* 1.689ff). Bergamin suggests that the reference is to the story that when Karpos drowned, Kalamos, son of the river god Maiandros, transformed into a reed out of grief (Nonnus *Dion*. 11. 369—481). (Although Nonnus claims that it is an old story, no prior attestation survives except in Servius' commentary on Virgil's *Eclogues* (5. 48), which indicates that the story was known in late antiquity, but probably not before.) Bergamin prefers this solution because "kalamos" is the name given to a reed pen, and *harundo* was sometimes a poetic word for it. (Bergamin, 81). However, Kalamos is the son of a god, not the sweetheart; certainly he is not the female "amica", which is why the riddle must refer to Syrinx.

[32] The riddle refers to the reed in its natural state but also in its use as both a pen and a musical instrument. In this last line the two possibilities are held in tension; both the pen and the pipes may be the "messenger of the tongue" worked by fingers, since ancient reed pipes had finger-holes. See A. Barker *Greek Musical Writings* (Cambridge, 1989), 16.

3. Anulus cum gemma
Corporis extremi non magnum pondus adhaesi,
ingenitum dicas, ita pondere nemo gravatur.
Una tamen facies plures habitura figuras.[33]

Ring with Gem
No great weight at the body's end, I clung,
Implanted, you might say, and so no one is oppressed by my weight.
Though having one face, I shall have many figures.

4. Clavis
Virtutes magnas de viribus affero parvis:
pando domos clausas, iterum sed claudo patentes.
Servo domum domino, sed rursus servor ab ipso.

Key
I bring great merits with little strength:
I open shut houses, but I also shut open ones.
I guard the house for the house-holder but in return I am guarded by him.

5. Catena
Nexa ligor ferro, multos habitura ligatos.
Vincior ipsa prius, sed vincio vincta vicissim.
Et solui multos, nec sum tamen ipsa soluta.

Chain
Bound, tied with iron, I will hold many bound.
Myself bound first, yet bound I bind in turn.
And I have freed many, yet I have not been freed myself.

6. Tegula
Terra mihi corpus, vires mihi praestitit ignis.
De terra nascor, sedes est semper in alto;
et me perfundit qui me cito deserit umor.

Roof-Tile
My body is earth, fire gave me strength.
I am born from the earth, my home is always on high;
And water drenches me but quickly deserts me.

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[33] This riddle depends on the Roman practice of engraving scenes into gemstones used in jewellery. The pun on *facies* suggests a creature with one face but many bodies, whereas the gem has a single face engraved with many figures. Moreover, both *facies* and *figura* may mean "shape", so it is possible to read the sentence as a straight contradiction: "Though having one shape, I shall have many shapes".

7. Fumus
Nunc mihi sunt lacrimae, sed non est causa doloris.
Est iter ad caelum, sed me gravis impedit aer;
et qui me genuit, sine me non nascitur ipse.

Smoke
Now tears are mine, but there is no reason for grief.
My path is to the sky, but the heavy air hinders me;
And what gave me birth itself is not born without me.

8. Nebula
Nox ego sum facie, sed non sum nigra colore,
inque die media tenebras tamen affero mecum.
Nec mihi dant stellae lucem nec Cynthia lumen.

Cloud
I am night-faced, but I am not black in complexion,
Nevertheless, at midday I bring the dark with me.
The stars do not give light, nor Cynthia illumination, to me.

9. Pluvia
Ex alto venio, longa delapsa ruina.
De caelo cecidi, medias transmissa per auras:
sed sinus excepit qui me simul ipse remittit.

Rain
I come from on high, dropping in a long fall.
I fell from the sky, sent through the middle air;
But a bosom received me which itself sends me back.

10. Glacies
Vnda fui quondam, quod me cito credo futuram.
Nunc rigidi caeli duris conexa catenis
et calcata pati possum nec unda teneri.

Ice
Once I was, and I believe soon shall be again, water.
Now held by the harsh chains of a frozen heaven
And I can suffer being trodden on but not to be held as water.

11. Nix
Pulvis aquae tenuis, modico cum pondere lapsus.
Sole madens, aestate fluens, in frigore siccus,
flumina facturus totas prius occupo terras.

Snow
A fine dust of water, I fell with little weight.
Melting in the sun, flowing in summer, dry in the cold,
I will make rivers, but first I occupy whole lands.

12. Flumen et Piscis
Est domus in terris, clara quae voce resultat:
ipsa domus resonat, tacitus sed non sonat hospes.
Ambo tamen currunt, hospes simul et domus una.

River and Fish
There is a house on the earth and it resounds with clear voice.
The house itself resounds, but the silent guest does make a noise.
Both move at the same time, guest and house together.

13. Navis
Longa feror velox, formosae filia silvae,
innumeris pariter comitum stipata catervis.
Curro vias multas, vestigia nulla relinquens.

Ship
Long, fleet daughter of the beautiful wood, I ride,
Crowded together with numberless bands of companions.
I travel many ways, leaving no footsteps.

14. Pullus in ovo
Mira tibi referam nostrae primordia vitae:
nondum natus eram nec eram iam matris in alvo.
Iam posito partu natum me nemo videbat.

Chicken in Egg
I shall recount to you the strange origins of my life:
I was not yet born, nor was I yet in my mother's womb.
Although my birth had already taken place, no one saw me being born.

15. Vipera

Non possum nasci si non occidero matrem;[34]
occidi matrem, sed me manet exitus idem:
id mea mors patitur quod iam mea fecit origo.

Viper
I cannot be born, unless I kill my mother;
I killed my mother, but the same end waits for me:
My death allows what my birth has already done.

16. Tinea

Littera me pavit, nec quid sit littera novi;
in libris vixi nec sum studiosior inde.
Exedi Musas nec adhuc tamen ipsa profeci.

Bookworm
Literature has nourished me, though I do not know what a letter is.
I have lived in books, though I am not more studious for it.
I have consumed the Muses, yet I have still not made progress.

17 Aranea

Pallas me docuit texendi nosse laborem:[35]
nec pepli radios poscunt nec licia telae.
Nulla mihi manus est, pedibus tamen omnia fingo.

Spider
Pallas taught me to know the labour of weaving:
Neither do my robes demand a shuttle, nor the warp its heddle.
I have no hand, yet I form everything with my feet.

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[34] A common belief in the ancient world, attested, among others, by Pliny (*HN.* 10. 82) and Herodotus (3. 109.1).
[35] This refers to the story of the competition between Pallas and Arachne over who was the more skilful at weaving (Ov. *Met.* 6, 5—145). According to Ovid, Pallas, enraged by Arachne's ability, tore her tapestry and struck her. Arachne tried to hang herself rather than bear such an insult but Pallas saved her by transforming her into a spider and the noose into her cobweb.

18. Coclea

Porto domum mecum, semper migrare parata,
mutatoque solo non sum miserabilis exul,
sed mihi concilium de caelo nascitur ipso.

Snail
I carry my house with me, always ready to move.
And when I have moved land, I am not a wretched exile
But my wisdom is born from heaven itself.[36]

19. Rana

Raucisonans ego sum media vocalis in unda,
sed vox laude sonat †quasi quae† laudetur et ipsa;
cumque canam semper, nullus mea carmina laudat.

Frog
I sing with a raucous voice in the middle of the water,
But my voice sounds with praise, [...] it itself praises.
And though I am always singing, no one praises my song.

20. Testudo

Tarda, gradu lento, specioso praedita dorso,
†docta quidem studio†, sed saevo prodita fato;
viva nihil dixi, quae sic modo mortua canto.[37]

Tortoise
Deliberate, with slow step, gifted with a splendid back,
[...], but betrayed by cruel fate,
Living I said nothing, as soon as I die I sing in this way.

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[36] Both Peck and Ohl render "concilium" as "wisdom"; a reasonable enough translation, though it makes the line rather perplexing. I am intrigued by Guarducci's view that "concilium" might be rendered "society" and refer to a late antique use of the snail as symbolic of a Christian. However, I regard this opinion as rather too speculative to incorporate in my translation. M. Guarducci "La Chiciola Cristiana" in *Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica*, 119 (1991), 447—56.

[37] The tortoise's "cruel fate" is that Hermes made the first lyre out of his shell. (*HH.* 4, 41). It is through the lyre's music that the tortoise sings after death.

21. Talpa

Caeca mihi facies, atris obscura tenebris;
nox est ipse dies nec sol mihi cernitur ullus.
Malo tegi terra: sic me quoque nemo videbit.

Mole
My face is blind, dark with gloomy shadows;
Day itself is night nor is any sun seen by me.
I prefer to be covered by earth; in this way no one will see me.

22. Formica

Provida sum vitae, duro non pigra labore,
ipsa ferens umeris securae praemia brumae.
Nec gero magna simul, sed congero multa vicissim

Ant
I am provident in the conduct of my life, not slothful in hard work,
Carrying on my shoulders the cost of a safe winter.
I do not carry much at once, but I amass much bit by bit.

23. Musca

Inproba sum, fateor: quid enim gula turpe veretur?
Frigora vitabam, quae nunc aestate revertor.
Sed cito submoveor falso conterrita vento.[38]

Fly
I am wicked, I confess; for what disgusting thing does my maw fear?
I shunned winter, I who return now in summer;
But I am quickly driven away, terrified by a false wind.

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[38] As noted above (see 37) the "false wind" refers to the fanning of fly-flaps used at banquets. See C. Jackson *Peacock* (London, 2006). Interestingly, Martial includes an epigram on a fly-flap in his *Apophoreta* (14. 67).

24. Curculio
Non bonus agricolis, non frugibus utilis hospes,
non magnus forma, non recto nomine dictus,[39]
non gratus Cereri non parvam sumo saginam.

Weevil
Not good to the farmers, nor a useful guest to the crops,
Not great in size, nor called by my rightful name,
Not dear to Ceres, nor do I consume a small amount of food.

25. Mus
Parva mihi domus est, sed ianua semper aperta;
exiguo sumptu furtiva vivo sagina.
Quod mihi nomen inest, Romae quoque consul habebat.[40]

Mouse
My house is humble but the door is open.
I live at small expense on stolen food.
The name which belongs to me, a consul at Rome also had.

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[39] Presumably this is a reference to the alternative pronunciation of *curculio* as *gurgulio*. However, this has been a point of some debate. Wernsdorf suggests that such a long name as *curculio* is incongruous for so small an animal. (C. Wernsdorf *Poetae Latini Minores*, II, (Altenburg, 1782), 413). Shackleton-Bailey dismisses the problem entirely by suggesting the line should be read "non *certo* nomine dictus" not "non *recto* nomine dictus".

[40] In fact there were three consuls called Mus. Publius Decius Mus (consul in 340 BCE), his son, also Publius Decius Mus (consul in 312 BCE, 308 BCE, 297 BCE, and 295 BCE), and his grandson, another Publius Decius Mus (consul in 279 BCE). They comically contrast with Symphosius' humble mouse since all three are known for their martial bravery. The three consuls are thought to have died heroically at the battles of Vesuvius (340 BCE), Sentinum (295 BCE), and Asculum (279 BCE) respectively.

26. Grus

Littera sum caeli penna perscripta volanti,[41]
bella cruenta gerens volucri discrimine Martis;
nec vereor pugnas, dum non sit longior hostis.[42]

Crane
I am a letter of the sky, written with a flying feather,
Waging bloody war with the swift changing peril of Mars;
Nor do I fear fighting, so long as the enemy is not too large.

27. Cornix

Vivo novem vitas,[43] si me non retia fallunt,
atraque sum semper nullo compulsa dolore,
et non irascens ultro convicia dico.

Crow
I live nine lives, if snares do not entrap me;
And I am always in black, though not constrained by grief;
And though not angry, I scream abuse of my own accord.

28. Vespertilio

Nox[44] mihi dat nomen primo de tempore noctis.
pluma mihi non est cum sit mihi penna volantis;
et sedeo in tenebris nec me committo diebus.

Bat
Night gives me name from the first period of the night.
I do not have feathers, though I have the wings of a bird,
And I remain in darkness, for I do not entrust myself to the day.

---

[41] This refers to the way cranes fly in a "v" formation. Martial also uses the image of the flying letter in his epigram on cranes in the *Xenia* (Mart. *Epig.* 13.75)

[42] There was a long-standing belief in the enmity between cranes and Pygmies. Pliny writes of the Pygmies that "quos a gruibus infestari Homerus quoque prodidit" (Plin. (E) *HN.* 7.26) ("this tribe Homer has also recorded as being beset by cranes"). Again, in Book 10, Pliny writes "Indutias habet genus Pygmaea abscessu gruum, ut diximus, cum iis dimicantium" (Plin. (E) *HN.* 10.30) ("By the departure of the cranes, which, as we have already stated, were in the habit of waging war with them, the nation of the Pygmies now enjoys a respite"). The Homeric passage Pliny mentions is *Iliad* (3.1-7).

[43] In the ancient world crows were thought to live nine human life spans. The most famous source for the idea is Hesiod (fr. 304.1). Pliny mentions Hesiod's belief, though he dismisses it (*HN.* 7.153). Other authors, such as Aristophanes (*Birds*, 609) and Horace (*Odes* 3.17, 12—3) attribute to the crow different numbers of life spans.

[44] Bergamin reads "vox", but I have adopted "nox" since it is preferred by most editors, including Shackleton Bailey. Both grammatically and contextually it makes more sense.

29. Ericius

Plena domus spinis, parvi sed corporis hospes,
incolumi dorso telis confixus acutis;
sustinet armatas segetes habitator inermis.

Hedgehog
The house is full of spikes, though the guest is of small body,
Pierced with sharp spikes on its unharmed back,
The unarmed inhabitant keeps armed crops.

30. Pediculus

Est nova nostrarum cunctis captura ferarum:
ut si quid capias, hoc tu tibi ferre recuses,
et quod non capias, tecum tamen ipse reportes.[45]

Louse
There is a new kind of hunting of wild beasts for us all
So that if you catch something, you refuse to carry it with you
And whatever you do not catch, you carry back with you.

31. Phoenix

Vita mihi mors est, morior si coepero nasci;
sed prius est fatum leti, quam lucis origo.
Sic solus Manes ipsos mihi dico parentes.

Phoenix
Life to me is death; I die if I begin to be born;
But the doom of death is before the beginning of life.
Thus I alone say that the Manes themselves are my parents.

---

[45] A reworking of a traditional riddle found in *The Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, 325. It was clearly a popular riddle—versions of it and allusions to it abound; for example, Pliny appears to be playing on this conceit when he says that he takes notebooks when he goes fishing so that even if he catches nothing he will bring something home (*Ep.* 1. 6. 1. and 9. 36. 6).

32. Taurus

Moechus eram regis, sed lignea membra sequebar,[46]
et Cilicum mons sum, sed mons sum nomine solo,[47]
et vehor in caelis et in ipsis ambulo terris.

Bull
I was the cuckolder of a king, but followed wooden limbs.
I am a Cilician mountain, but a mountain in name only.
I ride in the heavens and walk on the earth itself.

33. Lupus

Dentibus insanis ego sum qui vinco bidentes,
sanguineas praedas quaerens victusque cruentos.
Multaque cum rapiam vocem quoque tollere possum.[48]

Wolf
I am he who overpowers lambs with frenzied teeth,
Seeking blooded prey and gory nourishment.
And when I pillage much, I am even able to steal the voice.

34. Vulpes

Exiguum corpus sed cor mihi corpore maius;
sum versuta dolis, arguto callida sensu;
et fera sum sapiens, sapiens fera si qua vocatur.

Fox
A small body, but my mind is greater my body.
I am well versed in tricks, clever in my clear perception.
And I am a knowing animal, if any wild thing may be called knowing.

---

[46] Pasiphae, wife of King Minos, offended Venus and in vengeance the goddess cursed her to lust after a bull. Pasiphae convinced Daedalus to build a wooden cow to conceal her and thereby trick the bull into copulating with her. The ploy worked, and Pasiphae conceived the Minotaur. (Ov. *Met.* 9. 735.)

[47] Here I have adopted Ohl's text. Bergamin's reading, "sed non sum nomine solo" ("but not only one name"), seems to defeat the very point of the riddle: that each of these things, the mountain range, the constellation, the mythological Taurus and a bull, is "Taurus" *in name only*. Bergamin defends her reading by saying that the mountain "infatti è il monte dai molti nomi" (Bergamin, 126) ("is, in fact, a mountain of many names") and further, that her explanation is valid even without Shackleton Bailey's suggested textual emendation: "[n]on è necessaria la congettura di Shackleton Bailey, *non uno sum nomine solo*, per giustificare questa esegesi" (Bergamin, 126) ("Shackleton Bailey's conjecture, "non uno sum nomine solo", is not necessary to justify this explanation".)

[48] This refers to the ancient belief which Pliny outlines as follows: "creditur luporum visus esse noxius vocemque homini, quem priores contemplentur, adimere ad praesens." (Plin. (E) *HN.* 8.34) ("it is believed that there is a noxious influence in the eye of a wolf; it is supposed that it will instantly take away the voice of a man, if it is the first to see him.") J. Bostock, ed. and trans. *The Natural History of Pliny* (London, 1855), 282—3.

35. Capra
Alma Iovis nutrix,[49] longo vestita capillo,
culmina difficili peragrans super ardua gressu,
custodi pecoris tremula respondeo voce.

Goat
Nourishing nurse of Jove, dressed in long hair,
Wandering over the steep heights of difficult access,
I answer the keeper of the flock with trembling voice.

36. Porcus
Setigerae matris fecunda natus in alvo,
desuper ex alto virides exspecto saginas,
nomine numen habens si littera prima periret.[50]

Pig
I was born from the fertile womb of a bristly mother.
I wait for fresh food from high above.
I have divinity in my name, if the first letter disappears.

37. Mula
Dissimilis patri, matri diversa figura,
confusi generis, generi non apta propago;
ex aliis nascor, nec quisquam nascitur ex me.

Mule
Unlike my father, a different shape to my mother.
Of mingled blood, a breed not fit to breed;
I am born of others and none are born of me.

---

[49] Jupiter is said to have been raised by the goat, Amalthea. (Hyg. *Poet. Astr.* 2. 13).
[50] i.e. *orcus*, a god of the underworld.

38. Tigris

A fluvio dicor, fluvius vel dicitur ex me.
Iunctaque sum vento, quae sum velocior ipso;
et mihi dat ventus natos nec quaero maritum.[51]

Tiger
I am called after a river, or a river is called after me.
I am yoked to the wind, but am faster than it;
The wind gives me children and I do not seek a husband.

39. Centaurus[52]

Quattuor insignis pedibus manibusque duabus,
dissimilis mihi sum, quia sum non unus et unus;
et vehor et gradior, quia me duo corpora portant.

Centaur
Distinguished by four feet and two hands,
I am unlike myself because I am not one and yet I am one.
I both ride and walk, because my two bodies carry me.

40. Papaver

Grande mihi caput est, intus sunt membra minuta.
Pes unus solus, sed pes longissimus unus.
Et me somnus amat, proprio nec dormio somno.

Poppy
My head is large, within it are small pieces.
One foot only but that a one very long foot.
And sleep loves me, though I do not sleep my own sleep.

---

[51] In the ancient world it was believed that certain animals conceived by the wind. Aristotle was among those who subscribed to the idea. However, interestingly, the only extant reference to this belief in relation to tigers belongs to late antiquity. (See Opp. *Cyn.* 1. 320, 3. 350 ff.) References are strikingly absent from earlier sources, like Aristotle, where we might reasonably expect to find them. This precious, if inconclusive, clue supports the now accepted dating of Symphosius as roughly fifth century.

[52] There are several different accounts of the origin of the centaurs. Chiron, perhaps the most famous centaur and the teacher of culture heroes such as Achilleus and Theseus, is the son of Saturn (disguised as a horse) and the nymph Philyra (*Bibl.* 1.2.4). However, his lineage is exceptional. Most centaurs are descended from Ixion and Nephele (an *eidolon* of Hera devised by Zeus), or, in alternative tradition, from Centaurus and the Magnesian mares. It is not clear whether Symphosius has a specific tradition in mind when composing this riddle.

41. Malva

Anseris esse pedes similes mihi, nolo negare;
nec duo sunt tantum, sed plures ordine cernis;
et tamen hos ipsos omnes ego porto supinos.

Mallow
I do not wish to deny that my feet are like those of a gander,
Though are there not only two; instead you see many in a row
And yet I carry them all upside down.

42. Beta

Tota vocor Graece, sed non sum tota Latine;[53]
†ante tamen mediam cauponis scripta tabernam†
In terra nascor, lympha lavor, unguor olivo.

Beetroot
Whole I am called in Greece, but I am not whole in Latin.
[...]
I am born in the earth, washed with water, anointed with olive oil.

43. Cucurbita

Pendeo dum nascor; rursus dum pendo cresco;
pendens commoveor ventis et nutrior undis.
Pendula si non sim, non sum iam iamque futura.

Gourd
I hang while I am born; again, while I hang, I grow;
Hanging, I sway in the wind and am nourished by moisture;
If I am not hanging, I shall very soon I shall cease to exist.

44. Cepa

Mordeo mordentes, ultro non mordeo quemquam.
Sed sunt mordentem multi mordere parati:
nemo timet morsum, dentes quia non habet ullos.

Onion
I bite the biters, though I do not willingly bite anyone.
There are many prepared to bite me, though I bite:
No one fears my bite, for it has no teeth.

---

[53] This puns on the Latin *beta* (the second letter of the Greek alphabet, β) and beetroot. Moreover, according to Renehan, Symphosius' use of *tota* should make us think of τω τά. He reads the line "My name is whole (with TA) in Greek, but not whole (with TA) in Latin". R. Rehenan "Symphosius 41.1: A Literal Interpretation" in *The Classical Quarterly, the New Series*, 31, (1981), 255.

45. Rosa

Purpura sum terrae, pulchro perfusa rubore,
saeptaque, ne violer, telis defendor acutis.
O felix, longo si possim vivere fato!

Rose
I am the purple of the earth, imbued with beautiful blush.
Encircled, so as not to be violated, I am defended by sharp spears;
O blessed, if I were able to live for a long time!

46. Viola

Magna quidem non sum, sed inest mihi maxima virtus;
spiritus est magnus, quamvis sim corpore parvo.
Nec mihi germen habet noxam nec culpa ruborem.

Violet
Certainly I am not big, but I have the greatest virtue in me;
My essence is great, though my body is humble.
Nor does my sprig bring injury nor does any guilt bring a blush.

47. Tus

Dulcis odor nemoris, flamma fumoque fatigor;
et placet hoc superis, medios quod mittor in ignes.
Nec mihi poena datur, sed habetur gratia danti.[54]

Frankincense
Smell of the sweet forest, I am wearied by flame and smoke
And it is pleasing to the gods that I am cast in the middle of the fire,
Nor is this a punishment for me, but the giver receives favour.

---

[54] In his letter to Trajan probably written between 111—13 CE, Pliny the Younger cites the ritual use of incense as a means of identifying Christians because, he writes, it is not possible to force true Christians to perform these acts (Plin. (Y) *Ep*. 10.96). Ante-Nicene texts are uniform in their condemnation of the practice, and although frankincense came into honorific use amongst Christians in the fourth century, the idea that it is pleasing to the *superi* and that it ensures divine favour is pagan. Thus, in response to Glorie's assertion that "nihil in aenigmatibus christianum eum fuisse indicat",(Glorie, 149), ("[n]othing in the riddles indicates him [Symphosius] to be a Christian") we might add that *Tus* indicates that he was not.

48. Murra[55]

De lacrimis et pro lacrimis mea coepit origo;
ex oculis fluxi sed nunc ex arbore nascor,[56]
laetus honor frondis, tristis sed imago doloris.

Myrrh
My birth began from tears and for tears.
I have flowed from eyes, but now I spring from a tree;
The happy glory of green boughs, but the sad image of sorrow.

49. Ebur

Dens ego sum magnus populis cognatus Eois.
Nunc ego per partes in corpora multa recessi;
nec remanent vires, sed formae gratia mansit.

Ivory
I am a great tusk, kin of the people of the East
And now I have left in pieces passed to many bodies;
No power remains, but the grace of my beauty endures.

50. Fenum

Herba fui quondam, viridi de gramine terrae;
sed chalybis duro mollis praecisa metallo
mole premor propria, tecto conclusa sub alto.

Hay
Once I was a plant from the earth's greenery,
But cut down while soft by the steel's hard blade,
I am crushed by my own weight, packed beneath a lofty roof.

51. Mola

Ambo sumus lapides, una sumus, ambo iacemus.
Quam piger est unus, tam[57] non est et piger alter:
hic manet immotus, non desinit ille moveri.

Millstone
We are both stones, we are one, but we both lie together;
Just as one is lazy, so the other is not.
This one stays immobile, that one does not stop moving.

---

[55] The more usual Latin word for *myrrh* is *myrrha*. Symphosius' *murra* is a rare form, closer to the Greek μύρρα.

[56] This refers to the myth of Myrrha who fell in love with her father, Cinyras, and by him conceived Adonis. In her flight from her father when he finds she has deceived him, she is transformed into a myrrh tree (Ov. *Met.* 10, 298—502).

[57] Here I have accepted Shackleton Bailey's reading of *tam* over Bergamin's *tantum*. It seems to make more sense contextually and "quam...tam" is a more usual construction.

52. Farina

Inter saxa fui quae me contrita premebant;
vix tamen effugi totis collisa medullis.
Et nunc forma mihi minor est, sed copia maior.

Flour
I was between stones which pressed together and crushed me;
Nevertheless, with difficultly I escaped, all my inner parts crushed
And now my form is smaller, but its quantity greater.

53. Vitis

Nolo toro iungi, quamvis placet esse maritam.[58]
Nolo virum thalamo: per me mea nata propago est.
Nolo sepulcra pati: scio me submergere terrae.

Vine
I do not wish to be joined in a bed, although I am glad to be married.
I do not wish a man in my chamber; through me are my offspring born.
I do not wish to suffer the grave; I know how to plunge under the earth.

54. Hamus

Exiguum munus flexu mucronis adunci
fallaces escas medio circumfero fluctu.
Blandior ut noceam; morti praemitto saginam.

Hook
A meagre gift on the curve of a hooked point,
I offer my deceptive bait in the middle of the stream;
I entice in order to harm; I preface death with food.

55. Acula

Longa sed exilis, tenui producta metallo,
mollia duco levi comitantia vincula ferro;
et faciem laesis et nexum reddo solutis.

Needle
Long but thin, drawn from fine metal,
With slender iron I lead soft attendant bonds;
And I restore form to the torn, and connection to what is undone.

---

[58] Roman farmers used trees (especially elms) as stakes for growing vines. See Cato.*Agr. Orig* 32, Plin. (E) *HN*. 16.1. Accordingly, the vine and the elm became a common image of marriage in Roman poetry. (eg. Catull. *Carm.* 62, Ov. *Met.* 14.661—8.) However the vine as an image of the wife predates these Augustinian Age poets. It may even be found in the Old Testament. (*Psa.* 128:3).

56. Caliga

Maior eram longe quondam, dum vita manebat;
at nunc exanimis, lacerata, ligata, revulsa,
dedita sum terrae, tumulo sed condita non sum.

Boot
Once I was far bigger, when life remained,
But now lifeless, cut, tied, stripped
I am consigned to the earth, but not buried in the tomb.

57. Clavus caligaris

In caput ingredior, quia de pede pendeo solo.
Vertice tango solum, capitis vestigia signo;
sed multi comites casum patiuntur eundem.

Hob-Nail
I walk on my head, because I hang from a foot alone;
I touch the ground with my head, I mark with head-prints,
But many comrades suffer the same fate.

58. Capillus

Findere me nulli possunt, praecidere multi.
Sed sum versicolor, albus quandoque futurus;
malo manere niger: minus ultima fata verebor.

Hair
No one is able to split me, many are able to cut me;
I am colour-shifting, at some time I will be white:
I prefer to stay black, the less I shall fear my final fate.

59. Pila

Non sum cincta comis et non sum compta capillis:
intus enim crines mihi sunt quos non videt ullus;
meque manus mittunt manibusque remittor in auras.

Ball
I am not framed with locks nor am I adorned with hair,
For I have hair within that no one sees;
And hands send me and by hands I am sent back through the air.

60. Serra

Dentibus innumeris sum toto corpore plena.
Frondicomam subolem morsu depascor acuto;
mando tamen frustra, quia respuo praemia dentis.

Saw
I am full with innumerable teeth over my whole body.
I graze on leafy shoots with sharp teeth;
Never the less I chew in vain, because I spit out the reward of my tooth.

61. Anchora

Mucro mihi geminus ferro coniungitur uno;
cum vento luctor, cum gurgite pugno profundo.
Scrutor aquas medias, ipsas quoque mordeo terras.

Anchor
My twin spikes are joined by a single iron;
I wrestle with the wind, I fight with the deep water;
I search the middle of the waters, I bite the earth itself.

62. Pons

Stat nemus in lymphis, stat in alto gurgite silva,
et manet in mediis undis inmobile robur.
Terra tamen mittit quod terrae munera praestat.

Bridge
A forest stands in the water; a wood stands in the deep raging flood,
And the immovable oak remains in the middle of the water,
Yet the earth sends what fulfils the duty of the earth.

63. Spongia

Ipsa gravis non sum, sed aquae mihi pondus inhaeret;
viscera tota tument patulis diffusa cavernis:
intus lympha latet, sed non se sponte profundit.

Sponge
I am not heavy in myself, but a weight of water clings to me;
All my innards swell, spreading out in gaping caverns;
Water lies hidden within, but does not pour out of its own accord.

64. Tridens

Tres mihi sunt dentes, unus quos continet ordo;
unus praeterea dens est solus in imo;
meque tenet numen, ventus timet, aequora curant.

Trident
I have three teeth, held by one row;
In addition there is one tooth, alone at the bottom.
A divinity holds me, the wind fears me, the seas attend me.

65. Sagitta

Saepta gravi ferro, levibus circumdata pinnis,
aera per medium volucri contendo meatu.
Missaque discedens nullo mittente revertor.

Arrow
Girt with heavy iron, surrounded with light feathers,
I fly through the middle of the air, in swift flight,
And when sent, I return in departing, though no one sends me back.

66. Flagellum

De pecudis dorso pecudes ego terreo cunctas,
obsequio cogens moderati lege doloris.
Nec volo contemni, sed contra nolo nocere.

Whip
I, who come from the animal's back, terrify all animals,
forcing obedience by a regime of moderate suffering;
I do not wish to be despised, and neither do I wish to hurt.

67. Lanterna

Cornibus apta cavis, tereti perlucida gyro,
lumen habens intus, divini sideris instar,
noctibus in mediis faciem non perdo dierum.

Lantern
Fitted with hollow horn transparent in a smooth circle,
Having light within, like a divine star.
In the middle of the night, I do not lose the appearance of day.

68. Specular

Perspicior penitus nec luminis arceo visus,
transmittens oculos intra mea membra meantes;
nec me transit hiems, sed sol tamen emicat in me.

Window-Pane
I am looked deep into and I do not prevent light being seen,
Sending wandering eyes inside my limbs
Nor does the cold pass through me yet the sun shines within me.

69. Speculum

Nulla mihi certa est, nulla est peregrina figura.
Fulgor inest intus radianti luce coruscus,
qui nihil ostendit nisi si quid viderit ante.

Mirror
For me no shape is fixed, no shape is foreign.
Radiance is within me, shining with flashing light,
Which shows nothing except if it has seen something before.

70. Clepsydra

Lex bona dicendi, lex sum quoque dura tacendi,
ius avidae linguae, finis sine fine loquendi,
ipsa fluens, dum verba fluunt, ut lingua quiescat.[59]

Water Clock
A good control of speech, I am likewise a harsh control of silence.
Law to a greedy tongue, the end of endless talking.
Flowing myself, while words flow, so the tongue may come to rest.

71. Puteus

Mersa procul terris in cespite lympha profundo
non nisi perfossis possum procedere rimis,
et trahor ad superos alieno ducta labore.

Well
Water sunk far in the ground in the deep earth,
I cannot proceed unless a crevice has been dug,
And I am dragged to those above, drawn by foreign labour.

---

[59] Borrowing from the ancient Athenian practice, water clocks were used in Roman law courts from the Republican period on to limit the length of speeches.

72. Tubus

Truncum terra tegit, latitant in stipite lymphae.[60]
Alveus est modicus, qui ripas non habet ullas.
In ligno vehitur medio quod ligna vehebat.

Pipe
Earth covers a tree-trunk, waters hide in a log;
It is a moderate channel which does not have any banks;
In the middle of wood is carried what used to carry wood.

73. Follis

Non ego continuo morior, dum spiritus exit:
nam redit adsidue, quamvis et saepe recedit;
et mihi nunc magna est animae, nunc nulla facultas.

Bellows
I do not die immediately while my breath leaves
For it continuously returns, although it often withdraws;
Now my ability to breathe is great, and now I have none.

74. Lapis

Deucalion ego sum, crudeli sospes ab unda,
affinis terrae sed longe durior illa.[61]
Littera decedat: volucris tum nomen habebo.[62]

Stone
I am Deucalion, safe from the cruel flood,
Akin to the earth but much harder than it.
Let a letter leave: I shall have the name of a flying thing.

---

[60] In addition to lead pipes, wooden water pipes were also used in the Roman Empire, especially in Britain and Northern Europe. See R. Ulrich *Roman Woodworking* (New Haven, 2007), 88. Pliny discusses the merits of different kinds of wood for this purpose in *Historia Naturalis* (16.224).
[61] Deucalion and Pyrrah were the sole survivors of Jupiter's world-obliterating flood. When the waters subside, they appeal to Themis who tells them "Discedite templo/ et velate caput cinctasque resolvite vestes/ ossaque post tergum magnae iactate parentis." (Ov. *Met.* 1.381—3) ("Leave the temple, and with veiled heads and loosened robes throw behind you as you go the bones of your great mother.") They obey, rightly interpreting the bones of the mother to be stones. Those thrown by Deucalion become men and those by Pyrrah, women. Ovid comments that this is the reason for the resilience of humans (*Met*.1.414—5) and it was believed that the Greek word λαός, "person" derives from λᾶας "a stone", as a reflection of our origins. (*Bibl.* 1.7.2)
[62] i.e, *apis*, "bee".

75. Calx
Evasi flammas, ignis tormenta profugi.
Ipsa medella meo pugnat contraria fato:
†ardeo de† lymphis, gelidis incendor ab undis.

Lime
I have evaded the flames, I have escaped the torments of fire,
The very remedy fights against my fate.
[...] water; I am kindled by the icy waves.

76. Silex
Semper inest intus, sed raro cernitur, ignis;
intus enim latitat, sed solos prodit ad ictus.
Nec lignis ut vivat eget, nec ut occidat undis.

Flint
Fire is always within it, but rarely seen;
Indeed it hides itself within, it appears for blows alone;
It needs neither wood to live, nor water to die.

77. Rotae
Quattuor aequales currunt ex arte sorores;
sic quasi certantes, cum sit labor omnibus unus,
et properant pariter nec se contingere possunt.

Wheels
Four identical sisters run by means of science
As though vying, although a single task is for all,
And they hurry together though they are not able to touch each other.

78. Scalae

Nos sumus ad caelum quae scandimus alta petentes,
concordi fabrica quas unus continet ordo,
ut simul haerentes pronos comitemur[63] ad auras.

Ladder Rungs[64]
We are those who climb towards heaven, seeking the heights,
With a harmonious construction, one row contains us
So that we accompany to the breezes those who lean forward and cling to us.

79. Scopa

Mundi magna parens, laqueo conexa tenaci,
iuncta solo plano, manibus compressa duabus
ducor ubique sequens et me quoque cuncta sequuntur.

Broom
Great mother of cleanliness, bound by a firm noose,
Attached to the flat ground and held by two hands
Following, I am led everywhere and everything together follows me.

80. Tintinnabulum

Aere rigens curvo patulum componor in orbem;
mobilis est intus linguae crepitantis imago.
Non resono positus, †motus quoque† saepe resulto!

Bell
Rigid with curved bronze, I am put together to form a spreading globe;
The image of an agile, clattering tongue is within;
Placed down I do not resonate, [...] I often resound.

---

[63] Here I have adopted Shackleton Bailey's reading over Bergamin's rather perplexing "per nos comitentur".

[64] "Ladder", *scalae*, is plural in Latin, rather like the English *stairs*, and for the same reason: the ladder is made up of a series of rungs, just as stairs are made up of a series of steps. Thus the *Scalae* speak about themselves in the plural and the riddle turns on them being, in a sense, at once singular and plural. Ohl resolves the issue by translating *scalae* as "stairs" but this renders the last line of the riddle rather mystifying. "Ladder Rungs" seems to me to most accurately convey Symphosius' meaning.

81. Lagena

Mater erat Tellus, genitor fuit ipse Prometheus;[65]
auriculaeque[66] regunt redimitae ventre cavato.
Dum cecidi, subito mater mea me laniavit.

Wine Jar
My mother was Tellus, my progenitor has been Prometheus himself;
And my ears guide me, encircled by my hollow belly,
When I fell, my mother suddenly tore me to pieces.

82. Conditum[67]

Tres olim fuimus qui nomine iungimur uno;
ex tribus est unus, et tres miscentur in uno;
quisque bonus per se; melior qui continet omnes.

Spiced Wine
Once we were three who are joined by one name.
Out of three comes one, and three are mixed in one;
Each good in itself: better the one who has all.

---

[65] This is heavily reminiscent in both its conceit and its entitled solution of Thomas Wyatt's "Description of a Gun":
Vulcan begat me, Minerva me taught
Nature my mother, craft nourish'd me year by year;
Three bodies are my food, my strength is in nought;
Anger, wrath, waste, and noise are my children dear,
Guess, friend, what I am and how I am wrought,
Monster of sea, or of land, or of elsewhere;
Know me, and use me, and I may thee defend,
And if I be thine enemy, I may thy life end. (*The Poetical Works of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, G. Fillan, ed. (Dublin, 1858), 155.

[66] Symphosius' use of the later *auricula* rather than *auris* is one of the few ways in which he departs from classical Latin. The diminutive, *auricula*, only became standard in late antiquity.

[67] The late antique cookery book *De Re Coquinaria* (dating from the fourth or fifth century CE) opens with a recipe for *conditum paradoxum*. This recipe, which calls for honey, pepper, mastich, laurel, saffron, and roasted date stones is very similar to one given by Pliny (*HN* 14.108): in fact Book 14 of *Historia Natralis* is devoted to discussion of various kinds of spiced or mixed wines. The *conditum* referred to by Symphosius is much simpler, probably consisting of wine, pepper, and honey: cf. Aug. *De Tri*. 9, 7, which refers to a drink consisting of wine, water, and honey.

83. Vinum in acetum conversum
Sublatum nihil est, nihil est extrinsecus auctum:
nec tamen inveni quidquid prius ipse reliqui.
quod fuerat non est; coepit quod non erat esse.[68]

Wine Changed to Vinegar
Nothing is taken away, nothing is added from outside
Yet I have not found what I left earlier.
It is not what it has been; it begins to be what it was not.

84. Malum
Nomen ovis[69] Graece, contentio magna dearum,[70]
fraus iuvenis pulchri,[71] multarum cura sororum.[72]
Hoc volo, ne breviter mihi syllaba prima legatur.[73]

Apple
The name for sheep in Greece, the great strife among the goddesses,
The trick of a handsome youth, the care of many sisters.
I do not want my first syllable to be read short.

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[68] I have followed Shackleton Bailey in reversing lines 2 and 3 because the adversative "tamen" does not otherwise make sense.

[69] This clue is somewhat devious since the most obvious Greek word for "sheep" is ὄις, cognate of *ouis*, when in fact Symphosius is referring to another word for sheep, μῆλον. However, the bilingual pun was well known, it was remarked upon by both Varro (*Rust.* 2.1.6) and Servius (*Auct.* Aen. 4.484).

[70] At the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, Eris (Strife), who had not been invited, threw into the throng a golden apple inscribed *"καλλίστῃ"*, "for the fairest". Hera, Athena and Aphrodite all claimed it, causing the "contentio" to which Symphosius refers.

[71] The identity of the handsome youth is disputed. Baehrens suggests that it is Acontius who tricks Cydippe into marriage with an apple inscribed with a promise to marry him. When Cydippe picks up the apple and reads the writing out loud, she inadvertently plights her troth to him (Ov. *Her.* 20). Ohl and Shackleton Bailey prefer to identify the youth as Hippomenes who wins a race by distracting his opponent, Atalanta, with golden apples (Ov. *Met.* 10.569—707). Bergamin favours Paris. Certainly, it is difficult not to think of Paris since he is defined by his beauty and he figures in the story alluded to in the previous line, in that he judges the beauty of the three goddesses. However, if the reference is to Paris, "fraus" is rather obscure.

[72] i.e. the Hesperides, nymphs who tend the orchard which bears the immortality-giving golden apples.

[73] If the first syllable were read as short then *mālum* "apple" would become *malum* "evil". Well might the *malum* worry: in each of the myths mentioned the apple is the cause of some discord, treachery, or sorrow.

85. Perna
Nobile duco genus magni de gente Catonis.
Vna mihi soror est, plures licet esse putentur.
De fumo facies, sapientia de mare nata est.

Ham
I come from a noble lineage, from the gens of Cato.[74]
I have one sister, though more may be thought to exist;
My complexion is born from smoke, my taste from the sea.

86. Malleus
Non ego de toto mihi corpore vindico vires,
sed capitis pugna nulli certare recuso:
grande mihi caput est, totum quoque pondus in illo.

Hammer
I do not claim strength from my whole body,
But in a battle of heads, there is no one with whom I refuse to fight:
My head is large, my whole weight is in it.

87. Pistillus
Contero cuncta simul virtutis robore magno.
Vna mihi cervix, capitum sed forma duorum:
pro pedibus caput est, nam cetera corporis absunt.

Pestle
I crush all together with the great vigour of my strength;
I have one neck, but my form is double-headed:
Instead of feet, there is a head, but the rest my body is missing.

88. Strigilis aenea
Robea curva capax, alienis humida guttis,
luminibus falsis auri mentita colorem,
dedita sudori, modico subcumbo labori.

Bronze Strigil
Red, curved, large, damp with foreign drops,
Falsifying the colour of gold with deceitful flashes.
Devoted to sweat, I succumb to a little toil.

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[74] This is a punning reference to Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis (95—46 BCE).

89. Balneum
Per totas aedes innoxius introit ignis;
est calor in medio magnus quem nemo veretur.
Non est nuda domus, sed nudus convenit hospes.

Bath-house
A harmless fire goes through the whole building.
There is a great heat in the middle, which no one fears.
The house is not bare, but a bare guest is at home there.

90. Tessera
Dedita sum semper voto[75], non certa futuri;
iactor in ancipites varia vertigine casus.
Non ego maesta malis, non rebus laeta secundis.

Dice
I am always associated with a vow, uncertain of the future,
I am thrown with different spinning in the face of uncertain chances:
I do not mourn in bad luck, nor rejoice in good.

91. Pecunia
Terra fui primo, latebris abscondita terrae;
nunc aliud pretium flammae nomenque dederunt,
nec iam terra vocor, licet ex me terra paretur.

Money
At first I was earth, hidden in the secret places of the earth;
Now the flames have given me another value and name.
I am no longer called earth, but earth is obtained with me.

92. Mulier quae geminos pariebat
Plus ego sustinui quam corpus debuit unum.
Tres animas habui, quas omnes intus habebam:
discessere duae, sed tertia paene peregit.[76]

Woman in Labour with Twins
I have sustained more than one body should
I had three souls, all of which I was holding within
Two left, and the third nearly perished.

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[75] It was Roman practice to say prayers over the dice upon which were written promises of votive offerings in exchange for luck.

[76] I have accepted Shackleton Bailey's reading of *peregit* over Bergamin's *secuta est*. This is in part, because, with the exception of Bergamin, there is a universal consensus around *peregit* and in part, because it seems to make more sense.

93. Miles podagricus

Bellipotens olim, saevis metuendus in armis;
quinque pedes habui, quod numquam nemo negavit.[77]
Nunc mihi vix duo sunt; inopem me copia fecit.[78]

Gouty Soldier
Once valiant in war, to be feared amongst savage weapons,
I had five feet, which none ever denied.
Now I have barely two; plenty has made me poor.

94. Luscus alium vendens[79]

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

One-Eyed Garlic Seller
Now you may see what you may hardly believe:
There is one eye, but many thousands of heads.
He who sells what he has, whence will he buy what he does not?

---

[77] Symphosius' meaning is obscure here and is the subject of scholarly controversy. Bergamin suggests that the "five feet" refers to is the minimum height requirement for the Roman Army (Bergamin, 194) but, though commonly accepted, is problematic because the height requirement for the Roman army was never five feet. Some editors, including Glorie, amend the text so that it specifies six feet. Shackleton Bailey's elaborate solution requires considerable emendation of the line in order to support his view that the correct reading is to "twice five feet" and refers to a *decempeda*. I would like to propose a that the five feet are the soldier's own two feet in addition to the three feet of frontage assigned to each soldier in close formation. (See Veg. *Mil*. 3.14 and Polyb. 18.28). This has the advantage, among others, of explaining why the soldier no longer has the five feet, a point not addressed by Bergamin's solution. For a full discussion, see above 40—3.)

[78] The phrase "inopem me copia fecit" is a direct quotation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Met*. 3.466). It is apt, not only for its immediate context, but also for the wider Saturnalian context of the *Aenigmata* since it puns on the name of Saturn's wife, Ops. It fact, as Tissol explains, it is a double play since "*inops* and *copia*, from **co-opia*, are etymologically connected". (G. Tissol *The Face of Nature: Wit, Narrative, and Cosmic Origins in Ovid's* Metamorphoses (Princeton, 1997), 13.) The pun is concerned with plenty and privation and so is a fitting pun, not only for a misrule festival, but also for Saturn's annual feast. There may be a military pun here too: the plural of *copia*, *copiae* may refer to troops, and a *copis* is a short sword.

[79] This is perhaps the strangest riddle *topos* in all the collection. Stranger still, it proved popular—a reworking may be found in the *Exeter Book* (Riddle 86). Bergamin links it to a tradition of riddling in which the limbs of several creatures are added together and described as though they belong to a single creature; she cites the riddle of Óðinn and Sleipnir in the *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* as one such example. More pertinently, we might argue that the Sphinx's Riddle (a riddle Symphosius must have known) is another since the description of a human as walking on three legs relies on counting a walking stick as the third. Bergamin speculates that *Luscus alium uendens* might be "la rielaborazione di un enigma preesistente" (Bergamin, 194), ("the reworking of a pre-existing riddle"), though no source can be found for it.

95. Funambulus
Inter lucifluum caelum terrasque iacentes,
aera per medium docta meat arte viator.
Semita sed brevis est, pedibus non sufficit ipsis.

Tightrope Walker
Between light-flowing heaven and the low lying earth,
A traveller passes through the air by expert skill.
But the path is narrow; it is not sufficient for his feet themselves.

[96. De VIII tollas VII et remanet VI[80]
Nunc mihi iam credas fieri quod posse negatur:
octo tenes manibus, sed me monstrante magistro
sublatis septem reliqui tibi sex remanebunt.

Concerning Eight, Take Seven and Six Remain
Now you can believe me that what is said to be impossible can happen;
You hold eight in your hands, but under my demonstration as a teacher,
when seven are removed you will have six remaining.]

97. Umbra
Insidias nullas vereor de fraude latenti;
nam deus attribuit nobis haec munera formae,
quod me nemo movet, nisi qui prius ipse movetur.

Shadow
I fear no tricks from hidden treachery,
For god has given me this gift of form;
No one moves me, except the person who first moves himself.

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[80] This riddle is almost certainly an interpolation and is the only one with a lemma which is not self-explanatory. It is most usually solved by modern scholars as a description of Roman finger notation: "If a person with his two last fingers lowered for 8 raises the little finger, the one which by itself indicates 7, he now has his hand in the proper position for 6." J. H. Turner "Roman Elementary Mathematics: the Operations" in *The Classical Journal* 47 (1951), 63—74 and 106—8, 106. This solution was first proposed by Gesner and Kraus in 1720, and although others have been proposed in the meantime, this is in many ways the least problematic. Ohl also argues that the riddle refers to a kind of finger mathematics, though his solution is slightly different in the details: "hold up one hand, spreading thumb and forefinger so as to form a V; these plus the three remaining digits can be read as VIII. Depress the V and two digits; one is left, which, plus the five on the other hand, makes six." (R. Ohl *The Enigmas of Symphosius* (Philadelphia, 1928), 131.

98. Echo
Virgo modesta nimis legem bene servo pudoris;
ore procax non sum, nec sum temeraria linguae;
ultro nolo loqui, sed do responsa loquenti.[81]

Echo
An extremely shy girl, I observe well the law of decency.
I am not impudent of mouth, nor rash of tongue;
I do not wish to speak on my own initiative, but give answers to a person who
speaks.

99. Somnus
Sponte mea veniens, varias ostendo figuras.
Fingo metus vanos nullo discrimine veri,
sed me nemo videt, nisi qui sua lumina claudit.

Sleep
Coming of my own will, I show various images.
I devise false fears without any distinction of the truth
But no one sees me who does not close his own eyes.

100. Monumentum
Nomen habens hominis post ultima fata relinquor.
Nomen inane manet, sed dulcis vita profugit.
Vita tamen superest morti post tempora vitae.

Tombstone
I remain, preserving the name of a man after death.
The hollow name stays, but sweet life has fled
Nevertheless, life survives death after the time of life.

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[81] Echo was a nymph who fell in love with Narcissus but when she is rejected by him, fades in grief to become an insubstantial echo. Ovid recounts the story (*Met*. 3.339—510). In his version Echo loses corporeal form because of her unrequited love, but loses the ability to speak of her own volition because of Juno's curse (*Met*. 3.366—7). Juno curses the nymph because she waylaid the goddess with conversation and thus prevented her from catching Jove in one of his many adulterous liaisons.

Chapter One: Part II

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Writing Plurality:

Symphosius' "Encyclopaedia" of the Universe

furor est profecto, furor egredi ex eo et, tamquam interna eius cuncta plane iam nota
sint, ita scrutari extera, quasi vero mensuram ullius rei possit agere qui sui nesciat,
aut mens hominis videre quae mundus ipse non capiat.[1]

—— Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 2, 1

Symphosius' *Aenigmata* is a strange, anomalous work. It also appears to be an innovative work; as we have seen, nothing similar is to be found in Gellius, Athenaeus, or even Aristotle's discussions of the riddle genre. Indeed, Symphosius' own *praefatio* suggests that his collection of one hundred highly wrought (and as I will argue) interconnected literary riddles is unusual, even unique. For here Symphosius gives an account of his riddles' origin which, though clearly false, assumes a culture of oral riddling familiar to his audience. The *Praefatio* reveals that within Symphosius' milieu there is still a conception of riddles as oral and agonistic—as in our best late antique source on riddling, Athenaeus.[2] Symphosius' riddles, presented to their audience already solved, are in the greatest possible

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[1] "It is madness, perfect madness, to go out of this world and to search for what is beyond it, as if one who is ignorant of his own dimensions could ascertain the measure of any thing else, or as if the human mind could see what the world itself cannot contain." J. Bostock, ed., and trans. *The Natural History of Pliny* (London, 1855), 16.

[2] On riddling and other verbal Symposia games not covered in the account of Athenaeus in the Introduction, see A. Luknovich "The Play of Reflections between Literary Form and Sympotic Theme in the *Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus" in *Sympotica: A Symposium on the Symposion*. O. Murray, ed. (Oxford, 2000), 263—71.

contrast. It appears that in composing the *Aenigmata* Symphosius transforms or "translates" a genre which, even when it appears in literary works, was still essentially connected to its oral, "folk" past. In thus removing the Riddle from its popular context as a guessing game, so to speak, and endowing it with a new autonomy and intertextual sophistication Symphosius "invents" what was later termed the Literary Riddle; it is no wonder that he is regarded by modern scholars as "il fondatore di un genere" ("the founder of a genre").[3]

But Symphosius not only honed the form of individual riddles, he also opened new expressive and noetic possibilities by assembling a collection of one hundred riddles organized as an interconnected, unified work in its own right. As I will argue in this chapter, Symphosius' *Aenigmata* offers a unique imaginative representation of the material universe in all its diversity and ability to confound our expectations. I will argue that Symphosius has produced a carefully schematized work in which every aspect—imagery, form, structure and setting—is integral. It seems to me that his innovative departure from past models of riddling is, in itself, enough to warrant our search for such a schema and that our search rewards us with an enhanced understanding of the complexity and interwoven intratextuality[4] of Symphosius' collection. Indeed, because his use of titular solutions deprives the audience of the possibility of "guessing" his riddles in the usual way, this becomes the game or challenge for the audience; to perceive the complexity of the riddles' mechanisms, the layered patterns which order the collection, and the world view expressed by it. By presenting us with solved riddles, Symphosius forces us to go looking "in scirpo nodum", "for a knot in a bullrush", to go looking for trouble. Or, since *scirpus* may also mean "riddle", to go looking "for the knot in the riddle".[5]

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[3] M. Bergamin *Aenigmata Symposii: La fondazione dell'enigmistica come genere poetico* (Firenze, 2005), xx.

[4] Intra-textuality, or the internal relation between parts of a text, has been well explored in a recent volume which offers the memorable definition of intratextuality as the study of "how parts relate to parts, wholes, and holes": Alison Sharrock and Helen Morales, eds. *Intratextuality. Greek and Roman Textual Relations* (Oxford, 2000) 5.

[5] The proverb "in scirpo nodum quaeris" is widely attested. The earliest example is in Plautus. (*Men.* 2.1.22). It means "you are looking for trouble", literally, "you are looking for a knot in a bullrush".

When we are presented with a riddle collection which gives us answers before questions, as it were, what else should we do?

The extent of this departure from the "game" of riddling has often been overlooked by scholars. This oversight is well demonstrated in Riese' assessment that Symphosius' riddles are too easily guessed, of which, in turn, Peck jokes "[t]he fact...that Symphosius has very considerately given the answer to each [riddle] as its title, may have something to do with Professor Riese's criticism that they are "easily guessed"."[6] There has been a tendency to regard Symphosius' century of riddles as an anthology of individual riddles rather than as a unified work in which all textual features—including lemmata[7]—contribute to the overall effect. This scholarly disposition to think about each riddle in isolation arises from the practice of medieval writers and editors who cannibalized Symphosius' text and commandeered riddles for their own works or for inclusion in new poetic or riddlic miscellanies: Symphosius' riddles "circulated widely in the medieval period; later riddle collections frequently rephrased those of Symphosius or simply borrowed riddles from him wholesale."[8]

As has long been recognized, Symphosian riddle centuries—collections like that of Symphosius or those he inspired—act as "a kind of encyclopaedia".[9] However, the taxonomical principles that govern its organization are not immediately clear to a modern audience, except in the most general way, and very little scholarly attention has been paid to what the overall effect of this structure might be. Yet, Symphosius gives us every cue that the *Aenigmata* is a highly literary work, not least in that he sets his riddles in the context of a Saturnalian feast

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[6] E. Peck *The Hundred Riddles of Symphosius* (Woodstock, 1912), 9.

[7] Of course, lemmata are later additions of a manuscript tradition; however, as Du Bois' comment suggests, in the case of Symphosius, they appear to be original. Indeed, Bergamin sites their similarity to Martial's lemmata in the *Xenia* as evidence for the Saturnalian "ambientazione" ("ambience") of the *Aenigmata*. See M. Bergamin, xix.

[8] M. Bayless "Alcuin's *Disputatio Pipini* and the Early Medieval Riddle Tradition" in *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, G. Halsall, ed. (Cambridge, 2002), 157—78, 157.

[9] E. von Erhardt-Siebold "An Archeological Find in a Latin Riddle of the Anglo-Saxons" in *Speculuum* 7 (1932), 252—6, 252.

and in so doing immediately associates the *Aenigmata* with the time of the winter solstice and with a particular set of religious ideas which encompass notions of renewal and misrule. In itself this suggests that Symphosius has overarching literary aims and may well prompt us to expect that they will be reflected in all aspects of the *Aenigmata*. The present chapter will examine the structure of the *Aenigmata* and outline the world view implicit in it. It will consider how this world view corresponds to the mechanics of Symphosius' riddles; that is to say, how Symphosius enacts his world view in the process the audience undergoes in their reading of the text and contemplation of the solutions. Symphosius also reveals an interest in origins and change as a way of interrogating and understanding the nature of things; I hope to show that Symphosius creates a Saturnalian view of the world which stresses cyclical change, reversal and above all else, plurality in all things.

I began this chapter with a quote from Pliny which argues that an understanding of the natural world is necessary before any other kind of philosophical or religious speculation can be productively undertaken. In particular he argues against the madness of one "qui sui nesciat" ("who is ignorant of himself") attempting to understand other, greater things. He presents his *Historia Naturalis* as an attempt to understand the human world and the human condition as a preparation for greater questions. Symphosius' "encyclopaedic" *Aenigmata* may be viewed in similar terms. In their interest in life and death, origins and metamorphoses, reversals and cycles, the riddles probe the material world and ultimately beyond it.

The Order and Structure of Riddles in the *Aenigmata*

Of all the innovations which set Symphosius apart from his predecessors and most heavily influence his literary descendants, the most significant is the notion of the collection itself. This is a trademark which persists in the Symphosian tradition after all its other elements have been transformed almost beyond recognition. Even

Symphosius' closest formal parallel, Martial's *Xenia*,[10] differs on this point since the *Xenia* often presents several epigrams on the same topic, and the work moves from one topic to another with no stronger structuring principle than that all the epigrams on the same subject are collected together. The number of epigrams on any given subject seems entirely dictated by the limits of Martial's inventiveness, that is, by the number of paradoxes, puns or verbal plays which occurred to him in relation to it. Symphosius, on the other hand, composes one riddle per subject and orders them so that they trace a trajectory through the totality of the physical world that finally circles back upon itself.

Over the course of the one hundred riddles, Symphosius emphasizes the paradoxical, even the miraculous, in the everyday and the familiar. In fixing upon those aspects of a thing which are surprising, he makes his reader reconsider their perceptions of the world. The hundred riddles are organized in terms of a range of internal ordering devices rather than by a single principle—even here Symphosius is disposed to plurality. The three major strategies are: similarity of riddle subject, similarity of motif or theme, and aural similarity of lemmata.[11] The primary organizing principle is similarity of riddle subject. By this means, the *Aenigmata* are categorized into loose groups, the three largest and most prominent of which are animals, plant life and man-made artefacts. Often subject-based groups overlap; it is not unusual for sequences of riddles to belong to more than one of these. In addition to subject-based groups, clusters of riddles often share similar ideas or themes. For example, several neighbouring riddles from the "animal" category share the motif of "mixed species parentage". This thematic similarity is not necessarily evident from the lemmata, but rather emerges from the notions, imagery, and motifs foregrounded by Symphosius in the content of a riddle. It is important to note that this kind of noetic linking often cuts across the larger, subject-based groupings. Finally,

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[10] M. Bergamin, xix. As Grewing points out in his review of Leary's *Martial Book XIII: the Xenia*, the "literary closeness" of the *Aenigmata* and the *Xenia* is an area in need of further investigation. Grewing, F. "Review of T.J. Leary, Martial Book XIII: the Xenia" in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 38 (2002).

[11] The interrelationship of these three are outlined in appendix A in columns marked "Subject", "Theme", and "Lemma".

individual riddles may be placed together on the basis of a rhyme, consonantal rhyme, or assonance in their lemmata, as in *Grus* and *Mus* ("Crane" and "Mouse"), or *Tinea*, *Aranea*, and *Coclea* ("Bookworm", "Spider" and "Snail"), or *Calx* and *Silex* ("Lime" and "Flint"). Or they might be placed together because of a similarity of word, as in *Specular* and *Speculuum* ("Window Pane" and "Mirror"), or *Malum* and *Malleus* ("Apple" and "Hammer").[12] This system of internal echoes cuts across other groupings. In what follows it will emerge that reading the links, commonalities, and divergences is part of the riddling challenge Symphosius sets his audience. However, the intricacies of the *Aenigmata*'s web of almost infinite interconnections ultimately defy total analysis.

Thus the following discussion offers an outline of these groupings and also follows Symphosius' complex and highly idiosyncratic patterns of association but it does not aim to be exhaustive. Rather it sets itself the task of identifying the primary strands and major patterns operating in the structure of the *Aenigmata*. These patterns seem to reflect both oral and literate modes of thought and categorization.[13] A psychological study of these different modalities would be of great interest in relation to the changing cultures of orality and literacy in the late antique world but is beyond the scope of the present inquiry. Of greatest interest to this thesis is what these strategies and associations reveal about the conceptualization of the world in the *Aenigmata*. The most important thing to note in the complex matrix of relationships which the riddles bear to each other is that every riddle is linked to the next by at least one strategy. (In addition, each riddle is likely to link to others that are further afield.) So, overall Symphosius presents us with an intricately interconnected and complex, but decentralized, pluralistic world.

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[12] This delight in aurality is apparent in *Porcus* and *Lapis* ("Pig" and "Stone") where, as we have seen, the riddle asks a secondary riddle which may be solved by taking away letters from the riddle's lemma, leaving us with words which rhyme with the riddles' titular solutions, *orcus* and *apis* ("deity" and "bee"). It is also expressed in Symphosius' puns on Greek words. In *Malum* ("Apple") he puns on μῆλον meaning "sheep". In *Beta*, not only is the title a bilingual pun but, according to Renhan, Symphosius' use of *tota* should make us think of τω τά. See R. Rehnan "Symphosius 41.1: A Literal Interpretation" in *The Classical Quarterly, the New Series*, 31 (1981), 471.

[13] W. Ong *Orality and Literacy* (London, 2002), 52.

The first three riddles, *Graphium* ("Stylus"), *Harundo* ("Reed"), and *Anulus Cum Gemma* ("Ring with Gem") seem disparate at first glance. They seem disparate at second glance too because, as befits a riddle writer, Symphosius muddies the water, so to speak, about what they have in common. However, the commonality is that all three are associated with writing. The connection is obvious in the case of the *stylus*, and, when the other two are read rightly, the incongruous reed is revealed to be a reed pen,[14] and the jewelled ring, a signet ring for sealing letters. The signet ring suggests a link to the next riddle, *Clavis* ("Key"), which is also concerned with sealing things and marking property. The next riddle, *Catena* ("Chain") relates to the key of the riddle before, while the one after that, *Tegula* ("Roof Tile"), returns to the idea of the house, already mentioned in *Clavis*. From there Symphosius seems to have associated roof-tiles with chimneys and chimneys with the subject of our next riddle, *Fumus* ("Smoke"). The next four, riddles 8—11, *Nebula* ("Cloud"), *Pluvia* ("Rain"), *Glacies* ("Ice"), and *Nix* ("Snow"), are meteorological. Within this group there is the progression from the cloud (a relation of smoke) to riddles on water in its various states, starting with rain which is most closely associated with clouds. The water riddles bring us to the next group *Flumen et Piscis* ("River and Fish"), *Navis* ("Ship") and *Pullus in Ovo* ("Chicken in the Egg"). The first two riddles suggest that the continuing theme here is water related, however the egg riddle reveals that, although water may be the image which brought us here, the common theme of these three is that they are all dependent upon something else; the fish upon the river, the ship upon the sea, and the chicken upon the egg.

Pullus in Ovo is the cue for the next grouping. From here the *Aenigmata* turns to the animal kingdom, the next twenty-four riddles are on animals: *Vipera* ("Viper"), *Tinea* ("Bookworm"), *Aranea* ("Spider"), *Coclea* ("Snail"), *Rana* ("Frog"), *Testudo* ("Tortoise"), *Talpa* ("Mole"), *Formica* ("Ant"), *Musca* ("Fly"), *Curculio* ("Weevil"), *Mus* ("Mouse"), *Grus* ("Crane"), *Cornix* ("Crow"), *Vespertilio* ("Bat"), *Ericius* ("Hedgehog"), *Pediculus* ("Louse"), *Phoenix* ("Phoenix"), *Taurus*

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[14] In fact, Symphosius apparently imagines the reed as both the reed pipes and a reed pen. However, it is the reed as pen which Symphosius uses to link the riddle to its neighbours.

("Bull"), *Lupis* ("Wolf"), *Vulpes* ("Fox"), *Capra* ("Goat"), *Porcus* ("Pig"), *Mula* ("Mule"), *Tigris* ("Tiger"), and finally *Centaurus* ("Centaur"). Within this group there are several overlapping subsections. The viper and the bookworm are linked by their unusual and destructive sources of nourishment. The snail, frog, tortoise, mole, and ant, at least in Symphosius' depiction of them, are all marked by their self-sufficiency. The fly, weevil and the mouse are scavenging pests. The crane, crow, and the bat are flying creatures.[15]

However, the grouping of the louse, phoenix, and bull is distinguished by fact that it appears to be based on content rather than subject. All three riddles allude to famous ancient Greek narratives. *Pediculus* is a riddle taken from the story of Homer's death,[16] phoenix is a mythical creature, and the bull riddle turns on the fact that the mythological figure, Taurus, shares his name with the generic name of his kind. The theme, in the story of Taurus, of hybrid parentage is revived a couple of riddles later in *Capra, Mula, Tigris,* and *Centaurus,* all of which have to do with abnormal parentage. In *Capra* the goat is the nurse of divine offspring which is not its own, the god Jupiter. This links *Capra* with the following riddle, *Porcus,* which, as the creature says, has divinity within it "si littera prima periret" (36.3) ("if the first letter disappears). In addition, this group is structured so that the predatory wolf, fox, and tiger are juxtaposed against their prey, primarily farm yard animals such as the goat, pig, and even the mule. At any point in the text one may discern a series of ramifying connections between riddles that are not in immediate proximity, for instance, *Centaurus* also links to *Tigris, Taurus,* and *Mula* as a further instance of mixed parentage, with *Capra* in relation to the theme of nurture, and with *Phoenix* on the ground that each is a mythic creature.

From riddles on fauna, Symphosius moves to flora. Riddles 40—46 are concerned with plants: *Papaver* ("Poppy"), *Malva* ("Mallow"), *Beta* ("Beetroot"), *Cucurbita* ("Gourd"), *Cepa* ("Onion"), *Rosa* ("Rose"), and *Viola* ("Violet"). In

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[15] Unlike his Anglo-Latin imitators, Symphosius is not especially interested in bird riddles, nor does he represent birds in an especially positive light.

[16] See above 19.

many of these, Symphosius creates riddlic obscurity by describing plants in terms of animal imagery. This section is also marked by inversions. Beetroot, whose edible part grows under the ground, is placed next to the gourd, whose character as a hanging plant is emphasized for greatest contrast. The onion, a sharp smelling and uncomely plant is contrast with the rose, a fragrant and beautiful one. Yet both have their own defences. *Rosa* and *Viola*, the scented flower riddles, lead into the next group, *Tus* ("Frankincense"), *Murra* ("Myrrh"), and *Ebur* ("Ivory"), all of which are precious commodities. Here the inversion is between nature and civilization. These three are natural substances whose preciousness derives from processes of refinement that are the mark of civilization. Situated at the half way mark, these three riddles bring us back to the opening themes of the collection and in particular, to those of the first three riddles which are also concerned with objects commodified by the civilized world.

By contrast, the next set of riddles, 50—66, *Fenum* ("Hay"), *Mola* ("Millstone"), *Farina* ("Flour"), *Vitis* ("Vine"), *Hamus* ("Hook"), *Acula* ("Needle"), *Caliga* ("Boot"), *Clavus Caligaris* ("Hob Nail"), *Capillus* ("Hair"), *Pila* ("Ball"), *Serra* ("Saw"), *Ancora* ("Anchor"), *Pons* ("Bridge"), *Spongia* ("Sponge"), *Tridens* ("Trident"), *Sagitta* ("Arrow"), and *Flagellum* ("Whip"), is concerned not with the refined aspects of civilization's interaction with nature but with the concrete and the practical. Within this group Symphosius shows human attempts to cultivate nature (*Vitis* and *Fenum*) but also to subdue it to human purposes (*Serra*, *Ancora* and *Pons*). This more pronounced interest in human interaction with nature establishes the theme of much of the second half of the *Aenigmata*—the first half, by contrast, might be thought of as more concerned with nature's interaction with humanity. In the final riddle of this group, *Flagellum*, the hide of an animal is transformed by humans in order to subdue and control other creatures. This forms the link with the next riddle, *Lanterna* ("Lantern"), which turns on human use of another part of the ox or bull, the horn, out of which is made the lantern cover. In this case, the horn becomes a container of light, an especially miraculous and intangible aspect of the physical world. The phenomenon of light and radiance is the central image of the

next three riddles; *Lanterna* ("Lantern"), *Specular* ("Window Pane"), *Speculum* ("Mirror") leading to a final riddle, *Clepsydra* ("Water Clock"), which equally speaks of human attempts to contain the ineffable, namely the water clock which measures and orders intangible time.

From light and time, the riddles shift to a focus on the four elements. Riddles 71—76, *Puteus* ("Well"), *Tubus* ("Pipe"), *Follis* ("Bellows"), *Lapis* ("Stone"), *Calx* ("Lime"), and *Silex* ("Flint") are each marked by the combination of two (or more) of the elements earth, fire, air or water. The riddles on the well, pipe, and stone[17] are composed to stress the combination of earth and water. In *Silex* earth and fire combine, in *Follis* it is fire and air, and in *Calx* it is earth, fire, and water. In what we shall see is a common pattern, most of these riddles conform but one deviates slightly. Thus, in this group five out of the six riddles evoke human attempts to govern or direct the elements to their own advantage. The sixth, *Lapis*, tells of Deucalion's transformation of stones into human beings.

Riddles 77—81, *Rotae* ("Wheels"), *Scalae* ("Ladder Rungs"), *Scopa* ("Broom"), *Tintinnabulum* ("Bell"), and *Lagena* ("Wine Jar") relate to *Follis* (Riddle 72) rather than the directly preceding riddle in that they represent basic, everyday technology from the wheel to acoustics to the firing of clay and the invention of pottery. Riddles 82—83, *Conditum* ("Spiced Wine") and *Vinum in Acetum Conversum* ("Wine Changing into Vinegar") take their cue from the wine jar riddle, then Riddles 84—5 *Malum* ("Apple") and *Perna* ("Ham") broaden the theme to include other foodstuffs. Overall, there is an emphasis on those foods which humans treat to preserve or to make edible. Riddles 86—8, *Malleus* ("Hammer"), *Pistillus* ("Pestle"), and *Strigilis Aenea* ("Bronze Strigil"), are all about abrasive instruments or tools. The pestle, an implement used in preparing food forms the link back to the previous group while the *strigil* has an obvious connection with the following riddle, *Balneum* ("Bath House"). Similarly, *Balneum* links with *Tessera* ("Dice")—they are to do with leisure and pleasure. The gambling in *Tessera* leads

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[17] Symphosius makes it clear in this riddle that we should regard stone and earth as kin.

naturally to *Pecunia* ("Money"). Again this riddle emphasizes the relationship between nature and civilization. Money is made from metal taken from the ground which, in its incarnation as coins, may be used to buy earth. This recurrent theme underscores Symphosius' fascination with the difference between the human and the natural and, in particular, with the abstract value assigned to nature by humans. Land is valuable in itself (since it produces food, fuel, and metals) while money is the abstract representation of wealth; this riddle neatly juxtaposes the two.

Pecunia introduces the "human" riddles—a biting, if all too apt comment on humanity. Until now, human beings have appeared in the riddles only by implication as the presumptive makers of tools and foodstuffs, the wearers of rings and shoes and the users of lanterns and mirrors. Occasionally, they have appeared indirectly; the key tells us that it minds, and is minded by, the master, the weevil that he brings no joy to farmers and *Lapis* refers to the mythic Deucalion. But for the first time, in riddles 92—5, *Mulier Quae Geminos Pariebat* ("Woman in Labour with Twins"), *Miles Podagricus* ("Gouty Soldier"), *Luscus Alium Vendens* ("One Eyed Garlic Seller"), and *Funambulus* ("Tightrope Walker"), human beings become riddle subjects in their own right. It is one of the most interesting sequences in the *Aenigmata* and it marks a change in the whole tone and import of the collection. There is a new mood of self-conscious pathos, psychological dislocation, decay, disfigurement, a personalized sense of individual destiny, of the past and the future. The human beings in next four riddles are depicted in various kinds of extremity or duress. The woman in labour with twins has returned from the brink of death, the soldier is aged and sorely disabled, the garlic seller permanently disfigured, dysfunctional, and disadvantaged, and (in the pattern we have already observed in Symphosius) the riddle on the tightrope walker both conforms to the theme of human beings in extremity, and anticipates the notion of "presence in absence" which dominates the following group (see below). The tightrope walker negotiates the margins of what is possible since he walks "aera per medium" (95.2) ("through the middle of the air") between "lucifluum caelum terrasque iacentes" (95.1) ("light-flowing heaven, and low-lying earth").

These four characters are without mythic or literary precedent. They appear to be the unique product of direct observation. The soldier and woman in labour are engaged in activities that are fundamental for human beings and animals alike, by contrast with the one eyed garlic seller and the tightrope walker who represent the human pursuits of commerce and entertainment. Nevertheless, the former pair is individualized by virtue of the fact that one is gouty and the other giving birth to twins—regarded as a prodigy in the ancient world. It is worth noting in this connection that one of the few famous riddles that Symphosius did not adapt for his collection is the riddle of the Sphinx, to which the answer is "Man" or "Human Being". The generic facts of human development and aging provide the paradox and prove so strange as to be difficult to guess.

> ἐστι δίπουν ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ τετράπον, οὗ μία φωνή,
>
> καὶ τρίπον, ἀλλάσσει δὲ φύσιν μόνον, ὅσσ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν
>
> ἑρπετὰ γίνονται, καὶ ἀν' αἰθέρα καὶ κατὰ πόντον.
>
> ἀλλ' ὁπόταν πλείστοισιν ἐρειδόμενον ποσὶ βαίνῃ,
>
> ἔνθα τάχος γυίοισιν ἀφαυρότατον πέλει αὐτοῦ. (Asklepiades frag. 21b 4—8)

(Two-footed and four-footed and three-footed upon the earth, it has a single voice, and alone of all those on land or in the air or sea it changes form. And when it goes supported on three feet, then the speed of its limbs is weakest.[18])

It seems that such a generalizing riddle may not have suited the purposes of a poet fascinated by human diversity. In the *Aenigmata* Symphosius' focus, at least where

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[18] T. Gantz *Early Greek Myth. A Gide to Artistic and Literary Sources* (Baltimore, 1993), 496. Gantz cites Asklepiades' version as the earliest source.

human beings are concerned, is on instances of anomaly and difference rather than on our common traits.

Tantalizingly, the following riddle in the *Aenigmata* is lost. Widely agreed to be an interpolation, *De VIII tollas VII et remanet VI* maintains the correct number of one hundred riddles. However, as a mathematical riddle, it does, in some ways, fit quite nicely with the preceding riddles, as mathematics is a theoretical and pre-eminently human activity.[19] This leaves the final four most elusive riddle subjects of the *Aenigmata*: *Umbra* ("Shadow"), *Echo* ("Echo"), *Somnus* ("Somnus"), and *Monumentum* ("Tombstone"). Each of these is at a remove from something else; each exists because of an absence. A shadow is the reflection of, but is not, a solid body; an echo is the reflection of, but is not, the voice; and the dreams of sleep (the real subject of *Somnus*) are the reflection of, but are not, our waking life. Indeed, Symphosius tells us that sleep shows "varias...figuras" (99.1) ("various images") not only of waking life, but also of imagined, and often fearful, things. *Monumentum*, the final riddle, is a marker, if not a reflection of, death. It exists because of death and is the quintessential sign of absence. The tombstone interrogates the conception of the human from another vantage: the body is in the grave, the name is on the tombstone, but the human is gone.

Monumentum marks the gap between life and death and, in Symphosius' construction of it, between language and the reality; a wonderfully fitting final riddle. As we shall see, many of Symphosius' riddles play with the distinction between the sign and the signified; here that distinction reveals a grim reality. As a further revelation, Symphosius regards the tombstone as the marker of the separation between body and soul, matter and essence:

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[19] As the only unsolved riddle in the collection, this riddle has been the source of considerable speculation. Alcuin adds to its mystique by including it in his *Disputatio Regalis et Nobilissimi Iuventis Pippini cum Albino Scholastico* but without supplying the answer. Instead, Pippin "solves" it enigmatically "Pueri in schola hoc sciunt" ("the boys at school know that"). C. H. Beeson *Primer of Medieval Latin* (London, 1925.)

Nomen habens hominis post ultima fata relinquor;

nomen inane manet, sed dulcis vita profugit. (100.1—2)

(I remain, preserving the name of a man after death

The hollow name remains, but sweet life has fled.)

The early riddles of Symphosius' collection are often (though not always) light-hearted, in the vein of the witty and linguistically dexterous *Graphium*. However, as the collection progresses towards *Monumentum,* the riddles become increasingly sombre.[20] The body of the *Aenigmata* is a catalogue of the empirical and the finite but in his final riddles, Symphosius looks beyond this. At the very end of the collection, Symphosius asserts that "[v]ita tamen superest morti post tempora vitae" (100.3) ("[n]evertheless, life survives death after the time of life").

This is a statement appropriate to the *Saturnalia*, a festival concerned with, on the one hand, time, seasonal, and cyclical change, and misrule and reversal on the other. Unlike a teleological view in which events build upon each other in a linear progression towards an ultimate goal, the Saturnalia celebrates a world constantly in flux, always moving on and always returning. Temporarily, the high-born are mocked and the low-born raised to power. The festival of Saturn, the god of time, celebrates the turning of the year and so enshrines the conception of circular or cyclical time. Within this circular conception, Symphosius emphasizes images of reversal, renewal, and return. The writing of the *stylus* is ephemeral, while the pathos of *Monumentum* comes from the futility of the attempt to transcend time by erecting a lasting monument to the dead individual. Yet, as we have seen, the riddle also envisages that even death gives way to life: "[v]ita tamen superest morti" (100.3) ("[n]evertheless, life survives death after the time of life"). Like the Phoenix

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[20] The three final riddles, *Umbra, Echo* and *Somnus* have morbid overtones. In addition to signifying "shadow", *umbra* may refer to the ghosts of the dead. In the plural the word can refer to the Underworld. *Echo* too is imbued with gloomy associations since the nymph, Echo, loses the power to speak for herself as she loses her corporeal form and transforms into an intangible sound—a kind of death. Finally, sleep and death are indissolubly linked in ancient thought. In the *Iliad* they are described as twins. (Hom. *Il.* 16. 681)

who claims in one of the earlier riddles that "[v]ita mihi mors est, morior si coepero nasci;/sed prius est fatum leti, quam lucis origo" (31.1—2) ("[l]ife to me is death; I die if I begin to be born;/ But the doom of death is before the beginning of life"), *Monumentum*, proclaims that life and death are part of an endless cycle in which endings and beginnings are inextricably entwined.

This cyclic conception informs every aspect of Symphosius' collection. The opening image of the *Aenigmata* is of the seasons (re)turning. It begins: "Annua Saturni dum tempora festa redirent" (*Prae* 1) ("When the time of the feasts of Saturn was making its annual return"). Similarly, the first riddle is about the *stylus* which writes and erases and writes again (1.1—3). Even Symphosius' syntax enacts reversal; the undoing of the *stylus*' actions is positioned before their doing, "altera pars revocat quidquid pars altera fecit" (1.3) ("one part undoes what the other has done"). Later, in *Murra*, the final line of the riddle also reverses the order in which events occurred. Symphosius speaks first of the "laetus honor frondis" (48.3) ("happy glory of green boughs") that is, of the tree which Myrrha[21] eventually becomes, and then of the, as yet, untransformed woman as the "imago doloris" (48.3) ("image of sorrow"). As we shall see, this narrative of Myrrha's transformation is part of an intertextual fabric of aetiological myths which underpins the collection, all recounting new beginnings from old endings.[22] But perhaps most significantly, circularity is enacted in the very structure of the *Aenigmata* which begins and ends with riddles on writing. Furthermore, this circularity is confirmed by the echoing of the lemmata of the first and final riddles, a relation of assonance which neither shares with its neighbour. The opening pair is *Graphium/ Harundo* and the closing pair is *Somnus/ Monumentum*. Thus *Monumentum* completes the

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[21] *Myrrha*, the most usual Latin word for *myrrh*, is the name usually given to the woman. When referring to the resin or the plant, I have used the usual English spelling, "myrrh". Symphosius, characteristically, blurs the issue by using the less common Latin word for *myrrh*, "*murra*"

[22] Aetiological myths explain the origins of things, most usually through the transformation of a person or creature.

circle by forming a half rhyme with *Graphium* and so the collection loops back upon itself.[23]

Multiple viewpoints in the *Aenigmata*

One of the most striking aspects of the *Aenigmata* is that Symphosius endows inanimate things and animals with a voice and consciousness. Animal subjects and objects speak directly in the first person and the audience is encouraged to identify with them and their concerns. In fact there are only ten riddles (*Flumen et Piscis, Pediculus, Pons, Tubus, Silex, Rotae, Balneum, Luscus Alium Vendens, Funambulus,* and *De VIII tollas VII et remanet VI*) which are not written in the first person. Significantly, most of these are *not* about animals, but about human figures or the products of civilization. The exceptions prove the rule: *Pediculus*, for example, is a third person animal riddle but here Symphosius is retelling an old riddle (Homer's riddle) rather than composing a new one and he has retained the original third person perspective because the riddle does not work without it.[24] The overwhelming effect of the *Aenigmata* is to force us to see in new ways and from new perspectives. In general we are alienated from the familiar human perspectives and aligned with the animal, vegetable, mineral, meterological, (and sometimes even the manmade) Other; a radical reconceptualizing of the world fitting for a misrule festival. In most of the human riddles, the human figure is not distinguished from the elements in their environment: the mother from her twins, the garlic-seller from his garlic, the soldier from his battle line. Thus, their physical boundaries and distinct human identity are blurred. Indeed, in *Mulier Quae Geminos Pariebat*, the mother begins by telling her story in the first person, but retreats into the third person: "tertia paene peregit" (92.3) ("the third nearly perished"). Here we see her alienated from herself

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[23] John Donne uses a similar structure in *La Corona*. *La Corona* is a cycle of poems in which the last line of every poem is reprised as the first line of the next. The final poem, "Ascension", ends with the line "Deign at my hands this crown of prayer and praise". This becomes the first line of the first poem, giving the poem its circular "crown" structure. *John Donne: the Complete English Poems*, A. J. Smith, ed. (London, 2005)

[24] See above 19. Symphosius, as we shall see below, often reworks traditional, ancient paradoxes, many of which, if they are not in the first person already, are easily transferred into it. *Pediculus* and *Flumen et Piscis* are exceptions to this rule.

by her own anguish. In Symphosius' representation, humans are distant and physically removed by contrast with the vividly realized psychological immediacy of, for instance, the vine in *Vitis*.

Having alienated the audience from the normative human perspective, Symphosius' riddles encourage us to adopt the view point and stance of a range of Others. Rather than present us with a hierarchical view which privileges the human perspective, Symphosius seems to delight in giving a voice to all who are usually denied it. He is even prepared to defy Juno's curse and restore to Echo the ability to speak for herself and so, mischievously, he has her tell her own story. From riddle to riddle, the reader is forced to shift perspectives and inevitably allegiances as well. Each new perspective may be opposite of the previous one, tangential to it, or only slightly divergent from it. This dynamic multiplicity ensures that the *Aenigmata* cannot be reduced to dichotomies any more than to a single perspective.

Entitled Solutions in the *Aenigmata*

Plurality is expressed in the very mechanics of Symphosius' riddles. Typically, a riddle starts with ambiguity; its disparate clues suggest various possibilities, none of which turn out to be completely satisfactory, but ultimately, the conundrum is resolved by a single answer and certainty is achieved. In short, riddles tend to move from a complex of potential answers to a single solution. By contrast, each riddle in the *Aenigmata* begins with a simple entitled "answer" but, as I will argue in the following, this initial "answer" is increasingly problematized. Symphosius uses language in such a way that although the clues are (in most cases)[25] consistent with the stated answer they are suggestive of other answers as well. Thus Symphosius' riddles move their audience, not from complexity to certainty, but in the opposite direction from certainty to complexity.

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[25] *Lapis*, whose answers do not seem entirely consistent, is the exception which proves the rule. See below 106—8.

Although the entitled solution[26] became ubiquitous later, it was apparently unusual in Symphosius' time.[27] Ancient critical works on riddling suggest that the very idea of presenting a solution defeated the purpose of a riddle. Aulus Gellius says of his riddle[28] that "reliquimus inenarratum, ut legentium coniecturas in requirendo acueremus" (*Noctes Atticae*, XII, 6, 1), ("I have left it unanswered, in order that I might whet the reasoning of my readers in seeking for an answer.") In order to avoid both negating the purpose of the riddle and leaving the riddle unanswered, he advises his readers to look up the answer for themselves: "Hoc qui nolit diutius aput sese quaerere, inveniet quid sit in M. Varronis *De Sermone Latino ad Marcellum* libro secundo" (*Noctes Atticae*, XII, 6, 3), "He who does not wish to puzzle himself all day will find the answer in the second book of Varro's *Latin Language, addressed to Marcellus*."[29]

On the other hand, in the ancient world it was not unusual for riddles that had become widely known and orally disseminated to play off against the universally known answer. Although, so far as I am aware, scholars have not identified this strategy as a typical kind of ancient riddling, there are numerous examples of it in

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[26] This surprising aspect of Symphosius' riddling has attracted almost no scholarly interest. Howe has written on the same feature in Aldhelm, although there the feature is not so surprising since Aldhelm is following Symphosius' model. See N. Howe "Aldhelm's *Enigmata* and Isidorian Etymology" in *Anglo-Saxon England*, 14 (1985), 37—59, 37.

[27] As noted in the introduction, this feature was probably copied from Martial's *Xenia*—as Bergamin notes, these epigrams have "in alcuni casi titoli identici a quelli di Simposio" ("in some cases identical titles to those of Symphosius"). M. Bergamin, xix.

[28] Gellius' riddle consists of three verses, just like Symphosius' riddles:

semel minusne an bis minus sit nescio,
an utrumque eorum; ut quondam audivi dicier,
Iovi ipsi regi noluit concedere. (12.6,3)

I know not if he's minus once or twice,
Or both of these, who would not give his place,
As I once heard it said, to Jove himself. J. Rolfe, trans., 383.

However, as we see, the comparison ends there, for Gellius' riddle is constructed around a play on words, unlike Symphosius, whose riddles usually lack such a "trick" but instead rely on enigmatic, partial or metaphorical descriptions of things.

[29] Gellius' solution to this perennial problem for anyone writing down riddles is particularly ingenious. However, there are many possibilities. By the late renaissance collections of riddles such as *Riddles of Heraclitus and Democrates* are being published with solutions printed *below* the riddle itself so that the answer came *after* the question, while the modern convention is to print solutions in microscopic font upside down at the bottom of the page.

ancient sources, enough, I believe to suggest that it may well have been a common kind of verbal sparing. For example, we know from Athenaeus that the following well known riddle was variously answered "bear", "eagle", "serpent", or "dog":[30]

τί ταὐτὸν ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ ἐν θαλάττῃ (Athen. 10. 453 b)

("What is the same in the sky, on the earth, and in the sea?")[31]

In *Wasps* Aristophanes adapts this riddle in order to mock the cowardice of Kleonymos who is supposed to have dropped his shield so as to more speedily save himself during the battle of Delium in 424 BCE. The slave, Sosias, suggest mockingly that men may now ask each other a new riddle:

τί ταὐτὸν ἐν γῇ τ᾽ ἀπέβαλεν κἂν οὐρανῷ
κἂν τῇ θαλάττῃ θηρίον τὴν ἀσπίδα (lines 23—4)

("What is that brute which throws away its shield alike in air, in ocean, in the field?")[32]

Aristophanes clearly alludes to the well-known riddle but, by the addition of the phrase "throws away its shield", suggests a new answer. The implication in the original riddle that any creature which could inhabit the earth, the seas, and the heavens must be marvellous indeed, becomes a measure of boundless cowardice. Athenaeus' Cynulcus, a Cynic philosopher, refers to this technique of playing a new solution off against a universally known answer when he speaks of a "a well-known

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[30] "τοῦτο δ᾽ ἐστὶη ὁμωνυμία καὶ γὰρ ἄρκτος καὶ ὄφις καὶ αἰετὸς καὶ κύων ἐστὶν ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐν γῇ καὶ ἐν θαλάσσῃ" (Athen. 10. 453 b) ("This involves the use of equivocal words; for the bear, the serpent, the eagle and the dog are found in the sky, on earth and in the sea.") C. Gulick, trans., 555. Gulick explains that the bear is "the Great and Little Bear, also the bear-crab" the snake is the "constellation Serpens, also a kind of fish, Ophidium" and the eagle is the "constellation Aquila, also *Myliobatis aquila*, a kind of ray".

[31] C. Gulick, trans., 555.

[32] *Aristophanes: Wasps*, B. Rogers, trans. (London, 1924), 411.

riddle about a fish recast as an insulting joke directed at a rival musician"[33] or about the hetaera who "recasts the riddle posed by the Sphinx and solved by Oedipus… into an obscene advertisement for her sexual expertise."[34] Athenaeus also quotes an example of a similar reworking by Antiphanes of the riddle which the fishermen ask Homer. This well known riddle runs:

ὅσσ᾽ ἕλομεν λιπόμεσθα, ὅσ᾽ οὐχ ἕλομεν φερόμεσθα (*Cert.* 325)

(The ones we caught we left behind, the ones we missed we carry.)[35]

The answer is, of course, "lice", but Antiphanes punningly reworks it so as to have a different solution:

…ὁπότε προστάξαι τέ τις
εἰπεῖν ἐφεξῆς ὅ τι φέρων τις μὴ φέρει,
ἐγέλων νομίζων λῆρον οὐκ ἂν γενόμενον
οὐδέποτέ γ᾽, οἶμαι, πρᾶγμα παντελῶς λέγειν,
ἐνέδρας δ᾽ ἕνεκα. νυνὶ δὲ τοῦτ᾽ ἔγνωχ᾽ ὅτι
ἀληθές ἦν· φέρομεν γὰρ ἄνθρωποι δέκα
ἔρανόν τιν᾽, οὐ φέρει δὲ τούτων τὴν φορὰν
οὐδείς. σαφῶς οὖν ὅ τι φέρων τις μὴ φέρει,
τοῦτ᾽ ἔστιν, ἤν θ᾽ ὁ γρῖφος ἐνταῦθα ῥέπων. (Athen. 10. 448 f—449 b)

(…whenever a man enjoined us to guess in succession what somebody brought which he did not bring, I used to laugh, thinking he was talking drivel of a thing which could never by any possibility happen, just to catch us. But today I have come to realize that it is true after all; for we are ten men contributing to a club, and yet not one of us contributes any contribution of these viands. Plainly, then,

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[33] L. McClure, 270.
[34] Ibid., 266.
[35] Anon. *The Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, M. West, trans. (Harvard, 2007) 351.

what somebody brings which he does not bring is this, and that riddle applies to us here).*³⁶*

The audience was familiar with Homer's riddle and its usual solution and, as in Aristophanes, the play between the two solutions is the source of the passage's humour. The poet uses this riddling technique to give force to his point. This kind of riddling tends to be used as a mechanism of topical social critique since in each case the riddler takes a well known riddle and applies it to a present situation.[37]

It is only possible to use this technique if the riddler employs riddles which are well known to his audience. But Symphosius' riddles are largely original and his audience therefore could not possibly know the answers. So, in his case, the technique may only be employed if he first establishes the answers to his new riddles which he will later problematize. It is an ingenious solution. It also has the consequence of ensuring that the comic effect which this technique creates in the other examples cited is absent in Symphosius. Usually, the ancient audience would be anticipating the well-known answer to the riddle right up to the point where they are surprised with a new solution, the comedy deriving from their disappointed expectations. But in Symphosius, the audience is faced with an "answer" before they know the question. So reading the riddle involves a continuous comparison between the already-provided answer and each new clue. This process is contemplative, not comic, and rather than displacing one answer with another, Symphosius' text encourages us to see that the entitled solution is one among many possible answers.

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[36] C. Gulick, trans., 533—5.
[37] Tellingly, playing alternative answers against a riddle's "real" answer is a common feature of later riddles in the Symphosian tradition. It is most obviously found in the Obscene Riddles of the *Exeter Book*, though some critics even detect it in the riddles of the Child Ballads. See D. Atkinson *The English Tradition Ballad: Theory, Method and Practice* (Burlington, 2002). It is perhaps also present in Thomas Wyatt's "A Riddle of a Gift Given By a Lady".

The Triune Riddles

The plurality inherent in the proliferation of possible answers to any single riddle is played out in the content and imagery of the *Aenigmata*. Many of the riddle subjects define themselves as simultaneously singular and plural. Sometimes this is in rather modest ways, as in *Rotae* and *Scalae*. In *Rotae,* the wheels proclaim "labor omnibus unus" (77.2), ("a single task is for all"), while the ladder's rungs describes themselves as "concordi fabrica quas unus continet ordo" (78.1—2), ("those who one row held in a united shape"). The idea takes a more philosophical expression in *Centaurus* where the creature declares, "dissimilis mihi sum, quia non sum unus et unus" (39.2), ("I am unlike myself because I am not one and one").[38] However, the most striking example of this uniting of the singular and the plural is in Symphosius' triune riddles, *Conditum, Mulier Quae Geminos Pariebat* and *Tridens*. These are a marked site of the kind of riddlic play described above since each riddle bears a title which does not reflect the solution hinted at in its "Trinitarian" imagery.

The presence of Christian imagery in the works of a pagan author may seem surprising but in recent years scholars have recognized a much greater level of interaction between pagans and Christians in late antiquity than was previously assumed.[39] Macrobius included a Christian, one Evangelos, amongst the guests at the feast in his *Saturnalia*.[40] Why should not Symphosius draw on Christian

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[38] In this phrase "non sum unus et unus" we see Symphosius' characteristic negation of a statement yet to be made. The full riddle runs:

Quattuor insignis pedibus manibusque duabus,
dissimilis mihi sum, quia sum non unus et unus;
et uehor et gradior, quia me mea corpora portant.

(Distinguished by four feet and two hands,
I am unlike myself because I am not one and yet I am one;
I both ride and walk, because my body carries me.)

[39] Sogno, for example, argues that religion was secondary to politics in determining the alliances and friendships of the elite in late antiquity. See C. Sogno, *Q. Aurelius Symmachus: a Political Biography* (Ann Arbor, 2006)

[40] Macrobius makes no definite statement of Evangelos' religion. However, the name is suggestive, as is the fact that he is initially unaware that the Saturnalian feast is taking place. In addition, Macrobius attributes to him attitudes which pagans regarded as typical of their Christian contemporaries. Macrobius does not seem to feel an incongruity in including Evangelos in the pagan festivities. Indeed, although Evangelos arrives, as I have said, without realizing that a feast is taking

imagery in his Saturnalian riddles? Moreover, Ausonius, a riddling poet and, according to Ohl, a "kindred spirit"[41] of Symphosius', exploits the riddlic potential of the triune in his *Griphus Ternarii Numeri*. In this text Ausonius refers directly to the Trinity in a way that is "not mocking or blasphemous, but typical of the author's broad-minded urbanity".[42] This seems to me equally the spirit of Symphosius' use of Trinitarian imagery.

It is worth pausing here to consider the mechanics and imagery of the three triune riddles mentioned above in turn. The first is *Conditum* ("Spiced Wine"), a riddle which, in Bergamin's view, is constructed around an extended double play on the "termini della questione dogmatica trinitaria"[43] ("terms of the dogmatic question of the Trinity"):

> Tres olim fuimus qui nomine iungimur uno;
> ex tribus est unus, et tres miscentur in uno;
> quisque bonus per se: melior qui continet omnes. (82.1—3)

> ("Once we were three who are joined by one name
> Out of three comes one, and three are mixed in one;
> Each good in itself: better he who has all.")

The late antique cookery manual, *De Re Coquinaria*, begins with an elaborate recipe for *conditum* and Pliny devotes Book 14 of *Historia Naturalis* to a range of complex variations, all involving a large number of ingredients. The fact that Symphosius' riddle refers to fewer ingredients—Symphosius does not even make it clear *which* three substances "miscentur in uno" (82.2) ("are mixed in one")—suggests, as Bergamin thinks, that he has in mind the work of his contemporary, Apponius, who regards *conditum* as a metaphor for the Trinity (*Cant.* 11, 20). It seems that,

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place, he does not scruple to join the festivities; on the contrary, he seems rather offended at not being invited with more enthusiasm.
[41] Ohl, 15.
[42] R. P. Green, ed. *The Works of Ausonius* (Oxford, 1991), 445.
[43] M. Bergamin, 180.

amongst Christian writers, spiced or mixed wine was a common metaphor for the
Trinity in late antiquity; it is also used indirectly,[44] by Saint Augustine in *De
Trinitate*.[45]   Saint Augustine's language, like Symphosius', emphasizes that the
drink is both one and three and also that the parts are mixed, yet separate:

> Num ergo sicut ex vino et aqua et melle una fit potio et singula per
> totum sunt et tamen tria sunt. (Aug. *De Tri.* 9, 7)

> (It is, then, as one drink is made from wine and water and honey, and
> each is through the whole, and yet they are three things.)

In the next triune riddle, *Mulier Quae Geminos Pariebat*, the woman also
describes herself as having once had a triple nature: "tres animas habui" (92.2) ("I
had three souls").   As in the last example, the riddle draws on a metaphor already
imbued with significance in the Christian tradition.   In the *Gospel of John*, Jesus
uses the image of a woman in labour to refer to his own death and resurrection:

> Mulier cum parit, tristitiam habet, quia venit hora eius; cum autem
> pepererit puerum, iam non meminit pressurae propter gaudium, quia
> natus est homo in mundum.
> Et vos igitur nunc quidem tristitiam habetis, iterum autem videbo vos,
> et gaudebit cor vestrum (John 16:21—2)

> (A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow, because her hour is
> come; but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no
> more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. So also you

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[44]Augustine uses the metaphor of three ingredients to illustrate the relationship of *amor* ("love"),
mens ("mind") and *notitia* ("knowledge"), which, he writes, is itself an "imago trinitatis" (Aug. *De
Tri.* 9, 18), ("image of the Trinity").

[45] Bergamin also sees a connection with Augustine (whose influence she regards as pervasive
throughout the *Aenigmata*) and especially with his *De Trinitate*. See M. Bergamin, 180.

now indeed have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice)

The riddle's description of a body which has suffered "plus… quam corpus debuit unum" (92.1), ("more than one body should") might express the scourging, wounding, and crucifixion of Christ, especially in view of the ambiguity of the word *sustinui*, which may mean "to sustain", but equally "to endure". There is a further possible allusion to the passion of Christ in this riddle. The *Gospel of Matthew* depicts Christ on the Cross as suffering a moment of human distress when he laments "Deus meus Deus meus ut quid dereliquisiti me" (Matt 27:46) ("My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?"). There may be, in the woman's moment of greatest suffering when she is abandoned by the two souls she was carrying—"discessere duae, tertia paene peregit" (92.3) ("two left, the third nearly perished")—a parallel with the moment in which Jesus suffers a sense of abandonment by the other two persons of the Trinity.

Tridens is perhaps the least "Trinitarian" of Symphosius' triune riddles. Although it also proclaims its triunity in a way which might be interpreted as metaphorical—"Tres mihi sunt dentes, unus quos continet ordo" (64.1), ("I have three teeth, held by one row")—the language is not particularly suggestive of the Trinity. However, in the last line the trident claims "meque tenet numen, ventus timet, aequora curant" (64.3), ("and a divinity wields me, the wind fears me, the seas attend me"), which suggests parallel with the passages in *The Gospel of Matthew* where the astonished crowds exclaim, "Qualis est hic, quia venti et mare obediunt ei?" (Matt 8:27) ("What manner of man is this, for even winds and sea obey him?"). This echo of *The Gospel of Matthew* may even work to liken Christ to the pagan god, Neptune, who is, after all, the traditional wielder of the trident and ruler of the seas.

Christian Imagery in the *Aenigmata*

Although by no means the major theme, Christian imagery, allusion, and intertext are ubiquitous in the *Aenigmata*. The existence of such imagery exemplifies Symphosius' engagement with the whole spectrum of ideas abroad in late antiquity and for this reason alone it is worth pursuing. As noted above, this view is shared by recent scholars. Bergamin points to Christian echoes in the rain's description of itself in *Pluvia* "[e]x alto veniens" (9.1) ("I come from on high").[46] Guarducci has even argued for a Christian subtext in *Coclea*.[47] As the following will show, *Speculum* and *Specular, Funambulus, Clavis, Caliga* and *Vitis*, and finally *Vinum in Acetum Conversum* each exhibit overt Christian imagery.

Riddles like *Specular* and *Speculum* inevitably engage with Saint Paul's pronouncement that we see God "per speculum in enigmate" (1 Cor 13:12) ("through a mirror in a riddle"). *Specular* begins "perspicior" (68.1) ("I am looked through") perhaps an aural play on Paul's phrase "per speculum"; certainly it echoes his meaning. A similar kind of glancing, highly literate word play occurs in *Funambulus*. Symphosius describes the tightrope walker, who passes between heaven and earth, travelling a "narrow way". Symphosius' phrase, "semita...brevis est" (95.3) ("the path is narrow") could not have less in common with Jesus' phrase, "arta via" (Matt. 7:14). However, Symphosius' rather startling syntax allows him, in the preceding phrase, to place "arte" and "viator" side by side so that he achieves an aural echo of "arta via". This may seem like rather attenuated word play, but it is related to a kind of riddling described by Athenaeus[48] in which the aim is to construct words out of the syllables of a line of poetry so we may assume that such rarefied and virtuoso word play enjoyed a certain currency in late antiquity.[49]

The striking image of the "way" which leads the tightrope walker "aera per medium" (95.2) ("through the middle of the air") is also resonant with the Christian

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[46] M. Bergamin, 92.

[47] M. Guarducci "La Chicciola Cristiana" in *Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica* 119 (1991) 447—56.

[48] This corresponds to the first of Athenaeus' riddle type (as I discern them). See introduction.

[49] C. Gulick, trans., 578—81.

belief that the saved will meet God "in aera" (1 Thes. 4:17) ("in the air"). Thus Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "deinde nos qui vivimus qui relinquimur simul rapiemur cum illis in nubibus obviam Domino in aera et sic semper cum Domino erimus" (1 Thes 4:17) ("Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet Christ, into the air, and so shall we be always with the Lord.").

In *Caliga* ("Boot"), Symphosius returns to the Passional imagery of *Mulier Quae Geminos Pariebat*. The riddle subject is described in terms that recall the crucified Christ: "exanimis, lacerata, ligata, revulsa/ dedita sum terrae, tumulo sed condita non sum" (56.2—3), ("now lifeless, cut, tied, stripped/ I am consigned to the earth, but not buried in the tomb.) A more complex and ambiguous use of this imagery, is found in *Vitis*. Like the boot, the vine implies that it is buried but will not remain in its tomb: "[n]olo sepulcra pati: scio me submergere terrae" (52.3), ("I do not wish to suffer the grave; I know how to plunge under the earth.") Both *sepulchre* and *patior* (the etymon of "passion") are familiar in the Christian religious vocabulary and the paradoxical idea that the subject of the riddle does not suffer the grave *because* it can plunge under the earth perhaps recalls Christ's disappearance from the sepulchre in order to descend to Hell. The inevitable link between Christ and the vine, established by Christ's words in John 15:1 "ego sum vitis vera", ("I am the true vine") prompts and reinforces this set of associations.

Since the *Aenigmata* is so specifically set in the context of the drunkenness of the Saturnalia celebrations, *Vitis* inevitably conjures associations with wine. So we might be tempted to read this riddle as disrespectfully drawing on religious imagery only to supply a comically licentious answer instead. However, I believe that, like Ausonius, Symphosius exploits the parallel between the wine and vine imagery present in both the Christian and pagan religious traditions. Certainly Eucharistic imagery is emphasized by Symphosius' placing *Vitis*, the primary ingredient in wine, after the riddle on flour, *Farina*, the primary ingredient in

bread.[50] *Vinum in Acetum Conversum* seems to allude quite overtly to the ideas surrounding the Eucharist in its account of vinegar changing into wine: "sublatum nihil est, nihil est extrinsecus auctum" (83.1) ("Nothing is taken away, nothing is added") yet its nature is changing; "quod fueram, non sum; coepi, quod non eram, esse" (83.3) ("What it was, it is not, it begins to be what it was not"). In *De Mysteriis*, Saint Ambrose writes of the Eucharist: "non hoc esse quod natura formavit, sed quod benedictio consecravit: majoremque vim esse benedictionis quam naturae; quia benedictione etiam natura ipsa mutatur." (*De. Mys.* 9, 54) ("this is not what nature made, but what the blessing consecrated, and the power of blessing is greater than that of nature, because by blessing nature itself is changed.")[51] The idea must have been intriguing to a pagan audience, and particularly to Symphosius who, as we shall see in greater detail below, has such a marked interest in metamorphoses of all kinds.

Perhaps the most interesting example of Symphosius' use of the Christian tradition may be found in *Clavis*, a riddle often dismissed as an example of essentially trivial linguistic dexterity.[52] The riddle itself runs:

> Virtutes magnas de uiribus affero paruis
> Pando domos clausas, iterum sed claudo patentes
> Seruo domum domino, sed rursus seruor ab ipso. (4.1—3)

> (I bring great merits with little strength
> I open shut houses, but I also shut open ones.
> I guard the house for the house-holder but in return I am guarded by him.)

This is a familiar idea in Old and New Testament texts and in countless hymns and prayers. The earliest extant of these is from Isaiah 22:22: "dabo clavem domus

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[50]Of course the association between bread and wine is older than Christianity.
[51] *Ambrose: Select Works and Letters* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: a Select Library of the Christian Church. Second Series* X, H. Romstein, trans. (Edinburgh, 1896), 324.
[52] M. Lapidge and J. Rosier *Aldhelm: the Poetic Works* (Cambridge, 1985), 63.

David super umerum eius et aperiet et non erit qui claudat et claudet et non erit qui aperiat", ("And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open"). Symphosius' riddle clearly alludes to these ideas.[53] But it bears an almost uncannily close resemblance to the Fourth Advent Antiphon, *O Clavis David*. In it Jesus is the key (he is addressed as "Clavis David") which, though not bound, has the power to unbind:

> O Clavis David, et sceptrum domus Israël, qui aperis, et nemo
> claudit, claudis, et nemo aperuit: veni, et educ vinctum de domo
> carceris, sedentem in tenebris, et umbra mortis.[54]

> (O Key of David, and rod of the House of Israel, who opens and no
> one closes, who closes and no one opens: come and lead those
> bound, lying in darkness, out of jail and the show of death.)

In is interesting then that Symphosius' next riddle *Catena*, picks up where *Clavis* leaves off and continues the second half of the line from the Fourth Advent antiphon:

> Nexa ligor ferro, multos habitura ligatos;
> vincior ipsa prius, sed vincio vincta vicissim;
> exsolui multos, nec sum tamen ipsa soluta. (5.1—3)

> (Bound, tied with iron, I will hold many bound.

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[53] Jesus' promise in Matthew 16:19 draws on Isaiah 22:22: "tibi dabo claves regni caelorum et quodcumque ligaveris super terram erit ligatum in caelis et quodcumque solveris super terram erit solutum in caelis" ("To you I will give the keys of the kingdom of the skies and whatever is bound upon the earth will be bound in the skies and whatever is freed on the earth shall be freed in the skies"). Later, addressing a more general audience, Jesus says: "dico vobis quaecumque alligaveritis super terram erunt ligata et in caelo et quaecumque solveritis super terram erunt soluta et in caelo" (Matt. 18:18) ("Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.")

[54] P. Guéranger *The Liturgical Year* (Paris, 1879), 518.

Myself bound first, yet bound I bind in turn.

And I have freed many, yet I have not been freed myself.)

The language is not as close to the second half of the antiphon as *Clavis* is to the first. Nevertheless, the fact that Symphosius has juxtaposed the two riddles is unlikely to be accidental. Of course, the shift from the imagery of opening and closing found in *Clavis* to the imagery of binding and unbinding is common, not only in the antiphon, but also in the Biblical literature. Isaiah 22:22 emphasizes opening and closing, while the later passages from Matthew (see note above) emphasize binding and unbinding. These parallels are most suggestive in view of the fact that the Advent Antiphons are sung on the days leading up to Christmas, which is exactly the same time that the Saturnalia feasts took place.

It is always difficult to be certain to what extent intertext reflects the conscious intention of the poet. In the case of Symphosius about whom so little can be known, it is even more perilous to hazard an opinion. Moreover, it should be recognized that Christianity and the various other religions of the Roman Empire share a vocabulary of religious images despite their profound differences, and that this may distort our perception of how deliberately Symphosius is drawing parallels. On the other hand, given the religious climate of the fourth and fifth centuries,[55] it is difficult to believe that Symphosius could have been entirely unaware of this interplay, so very much in keeping with the pluralist ideology of the *Aenigmata*. Perhaps, the emphasis on paradox in Christian literature appealed to Symphosius as providing a source of ideas that were especially suitable for riddling.

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[55] The fourth century in particular is noted for the great inroads made by Christianity amongst the pagan elite.

Classical Allusion in the *Aenigmata*

Those riddles which draw on Greek and Roman myth (with which Symphosius is obviously extremely familiar) tease and confound the reader by setting various strands of mythological narrative against each other.[56] Two intricate and complex examples of this kind of play are *Lapis* and *Lagena*. *Lapis* immediately breaks the cardinal rule of riddling by beginning with a direct statement of identity, "Deucalion ego sum":

> Deucalion ego sum, crudeli sospes ab unda,
>
> affinis terrae sed longe durior illa.
>
> Littera decedat: uolucris tum nomen habebo. (74.1—3)

> (I am Deucalion, safe from the cruel flood,
>
> Akin to the earth but much harder than it.
>
> Let a letter leave: I shall have the name of a flying thing.)

This is such an unusual opening gambit that eighteenth century editors such as Heumann, Lenglet, and Wernsdorf[57] preferred to adopt the doubtful variant "Deucalionis ego sum"[58] ("I am of Deucalion")—a suggestion rejected by modern editors. Despite such an emphatic opening declaration, "Deucalion" seems to be the wrong answer, or at least an answer in conflict with the entitled solution, but then, the entitled solution, "lapis", is by no means a straightforward answer either. Most irreconcilable is the identification of Deucalion with the stone. Certainly the two are metonymically associated through the myth of the re-creation of humanity after the great flood. Deucalion and Pyrrha, the sole survivors, pray to Themis that the human race might be restored. According to Ovid, the goddess answers with what is a riddle in its own right:

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[56] Stroumsa claims that thinkers in late antiquity understood all "myths as riddles". G. Stroumsa "Myth as Enigma: Cultural Hermeneutics in Late Antiquity" in *Untying the Knot: on Riddles and Other Enigmatic Modes*, G. Hasan-Rokem and D. Shulman, eds. (Oxford, 1996), 271—283, 271.

[57] *L. Caecilii Firmiani Lactantii Symposium*, C. Heuman, ed. (Hanover, 1722), N. Lenglet du Fresnoy, ed. *Lactantii Opera*, II (Paris, 1748), and C. Wernsdorf, *Poetae Latini Minores*, III, (Altenburg, 1782).

[58] M. Bergamin, 53.

> "discedite templo
> et velate caput cinctasque resolvite vestes
> ossaque post tergum magnae iactate parentis!" (Ov. *Met.*, 1. 381—3.)

> (Leave the temple, and with veiled heads and loosened robes throw
> behind you as you go the bones of your great mother.")

Distressed by what she believes is an instruction to desecrate her mother's grave, Pyrrha refuses to obey, until Deucalion realizes that their "magna parens" is the earth itself, and that the "bones of the mother" must refer to the stones that are, in a sense, the earth's skeleton. Thereupon, Deucalion and Pyrrha fulfil the goddess' oracular[59] command and repopulate the earth. It is reasonable to assume that Symphosius was particularly familiar with this episode from the *Metamorphoses* since he later plays on it in *Scopa* when he describes the broom as "Mundi magna parens" (79.1) ("Great mother of cleanliness"). The pun turns on the word *mundi*; if read as a noun it would mean "of mankind" suggesting the Ovidian "magna parens", but if read correctly as an adjective it means "of cleanliness" and it refers to the riddle's solution, a broom. As in Ovid, the "Great Mother" turns out to be other than she seems. Themis' words seem to refer to Pyrrha's mother when they actually refer to the earth; in *Scopa*, the figure that appeared to be the earth, is actually merely a broom.

While the myth of the repopulation of the world explains the link between Deucalion and "stone", its paradox turns on the fact that Deucalion and Pyrrha are both descended from the primal Titans, so they of all humankind do not find their genesis in stones, even metaphorically speaking. The metaphor is only appropriate

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[59] Athenaeus actually includes an oracle related by Plato, in his list of riddles (C. Gulick, trans., 568—569) which suggests that there is a link in the Ancient world between riddles and the language of oracles. It is characteristic of Symphosius that his allusions are to texts which are in themselves riddlic.

to the post-diluvian humans born from Deucalion and Pyrrha's stones.[60] Because these are the humans who, mythologically, thereafter populated the world it was a recognized *topos* in ancient literature that λᾶας "stone", cognate of *lapis*, is etymologically linked to λαός, "people". Apollodorus concludes his telling of the story of Deucalion and Pyrrah: *"ὅθεν καὶ λαοὶ μεταφορικῶς ὠνομάσθησαν ἀπὸ τοῦ λᾶας ὁ λίθος"* (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.7.2), ("This was how people came to be called "laoi", by metaphor from the word "laas", "a stone").[61] Ironically, Deucalion and Pyrrha are the *only* postdiluvian humans who cannot be regarded as metaphorical or actual stones. The "lapis" of the riddle's lemma is not Deucalion, but his is the indispensable intervention which brings about its metamorphosis into a human being.

Symphosius has not finished yet. In the last line the speaker tells us that if one letter were to be taken away "volucris quoque nomen habebo" (74.3) ("I shall have the name of a flying thing"). The answer is obviously "bee" (*lapis* without the first letter is *apis*). However, within the mythic context of the creation story, a *lapis* is already a "flying thing" by virtue of having been thrown by Deucalion or Pyrrah; there is no need to take a letter away, the puzzle is solved by the riddle's lemma. In a sense the riddle works counter to the myth. The riddle claims that the stones will be transformed *into* flying things by the subtraction of a letter, but in the myth, the stones transform *from* flying things into human beings. In the riddle, when a stone is no longer a stone it is a bee (*apis*), in the myth when a stone is no longer a stone it is a human being. Thus like Deucalion, Symphosius, transforms a rock into a living thing. But while Deucalion works this metamorphosis entirely through the miraculous agency of the gods, Symphosius transforms the stone through the power of his wit and words.

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[60] Ovid stresses the difference between those human before and after the flood. He writes that the rock-born humans demonstrate their origins in their strength and endurance (Ov. *Met.* 1. 414—5).
[61] *Apollodorus: The Library*, J. Frazer, ed. and trans. (Cambridge, MA., 1921), 55, *Apollodorus: The Library of Greek Mythology*, R. Hard, trans. (Oxford, 1997) 37.

Lagena draws on the same aetiological mythological matrix as *Lapis*. Both riddles are concerned with parentage and each begins with what is apparently a direct statement of identity. Bergamin observes that the riddle subject proclaims its lineage in "tono epico"[62] ("epic tone"): "Mater erat Tellus, genitor fuit ipse Prometheus" (81.1) ("My mother was Tellus, my progenitor has been Prometheus himself").[63] Arguably, this is a greater violation of the riddle genre than the direct naming in *Lapis*, since parentage is such an essential part of identity. It is by proclaiming their lineage that heroes on the Greek stage or in Greek epic identify themselves. Indeed, Symphosius may be alluding to the opening scene of Aristophanes' *Frogs* in which the god Dionysos identifies himself as "Διόνυσος, υἱὸς Σταμνίου" (Ar. *Frogs.* 22), ("Dionysos, son of Flagon").[64] Aristophanes depicts a god proclaiming descent from a wine jar, but in *Lagena*, Symphosius has a wine jar claim descent from gods (the primal Titans, Tellus and Prometheus). In Aristophanes, the *stamnos* is metaphorically Dionysos' progenitor, while in *Lagena* the goddess Tellus and the titan Prometheus, stand metonymically for earth and fire,[65] the two defining elements required for pottery.

However, as in *Lapis*, the metaphor is displaced. Just as Deucalion is *not* the stones he throws, Prometheus is *not* the fire he steals from the gods. The parallel continues: Deucalion has stones before he throws them away, his father, Prometheus, has fire but gives it away. Symphosius identifies each with what he no longer has. Moreover, these "displaced" personifications allow a confusion between the sign and signified. In the case of *Lagena*, this confusion is unsettling in that it leads us to imagine that the riddle subject is the product of incest. Tellus, Prometheus' partner in metaphorically engendering the wine jar, is also his mythic grandmother.[66] This "improper parentage" ends with the unnatural act of a mother

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[62] M. Bergamin, 179.
[63] Symphosius makes Prometheus stand for the fire needed to engender the wine jar from the raw clay. This departs somewhat from the archaic Greek formulation in which Prometheus is the giver to humanity of divine fire stolen from the gods. It should be noted that the literal identification of Prometheus with fire is a typical late antique riddle strategy, see (Athen. 10.76).
[64] J. Henderson, trans., 11.
[65] A frequent coupling in Symphosius.
[66] SeeT. Gantz *Early Greek Myth. A Guide to Artistic and Literary Sources* (Baltimore, 1993), 40—1.

destroying her child, "mater mea me laniavit." (81.3) ("my mother tore me to pieces").

On the other hand, if we read the mythological clues with a different emphasis we are confronted with a new answer. Glorie suggests that *Lagena* alludes to Propertius' description of Promethius creating human beings by fashioning their forms from the earth (*tellus*) (*Elg.* 3.5,7—8).[67] In this reading "*tellus*" does not refer to the Titan (Tellus), but only to the earth (*tellus*) which she personifies. It also suggests that an alternative answer to the riddle is "humanity", rather than "wine jar", since human beings are the "child", so to speak, of "*tellus*" and Prometheus. Symphosius exploits the potential for ambiguity by referring to the earth as *Tellus* rather than the more usual *terra*.[68]

The reference to Propertius exposes the conflict between the literal and the metaphorical readings of the riddle's terms and alerts us to the fact that *Lagena* offers three ways of reading the lineage of the wine jar. The first is that both "Tellus" and "Prometheus" are understood metaphorically (earth and fire). This gives the solution announced in the lemma, "wine jar". The second is that both "Tellus" and "Prometheus" are understood literally as the two Titans, in which case the riddle subject would be an incestuous offspring that does not exist in the myth tradition. (Here Symphosius wickedly invites the guesser to rack their brains—and their presumably extensive knowledge of myth—in order to recall a character who does not, in fact, exist.)[69] The third, if we accept Glorie's suggestion of a reference to Propertius, mixes the literal and metaphorical so that Prometheus is literally the Titan, but Tellus is the clay from which was made humans, the third answer to the riddle.

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[67] Glorie, F. ed. "Variae collectiones aenigmatum Merovingicae aetatis" in *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* 133a (Turnholt, 1968), 703.
[68] In fact, both *tellus* and *terra* may be used interchangeably to refer to either the earth or the titan. *Tellus* is slightly more common when referring to the titan, *terra* when referring to the earth.
[69] Athenaeus confirms that extensive knowledge of myth was a highly prized, much exhibited acquisition in late antiquity.

The Name and the Thing: Etymology and Aetiology in the *Aenigmata*

To some extent, all riddles are an expression of the power and importance of the word. However, within the *Aenigmata* there is a subset of riddles which embody what we might term the "Aristotelian" conception of riddles as a genre which creates impossibility through the use of words.[70] In Aristotle's view, it is the word, rather than the thing itself, which creates the paradox, and it is the word, which, in naming the riddle subject, has the capacity to resolve a conundrum. Riddles of this kind rely on puns and other forms of word play for their paradoxes. In the most extreme manifestation, it is the word, the sign in and of itself, which proves to be the solution to the riddle. Here the object is to guess the *word*, entirely dislocated from a specific meaning. We have already encountered an example of this kind of riddling in Athenaeus: "What is the same in the sky, on the earth, and in the sea?"[71] The answer is not a single animal but rather a *word* which may refer to three different animals, one flighted or celestial animal, one land, and one marine. So for example, the riddle was sometimes answered "bear" since the bear is a land animal but there is also a constellation, Ursa Major, the Great Bear, and finally the marine animal, the bear-crab.[72] When Symphosius employs this kind of riddlic conceit he constructs clues which refer to any of the possible meanings of the "answer-word". But more usually, Symphosius prefers to draw his riddles from metamorphosis stories where the protagonist's name becomes generic for whatever she or he has become. Such stories or, more properly, aetiological myths dramatize the idea that an essential connection exits between name and named.

Let us consider *Taurus*, perhaps one of the most striking examples of Symphosius' use of this technique:

Moechus eram regis, sed lignea membra sequebar;
et Cilicum mons sum, sed mons sum nomine solo

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[70] "*αἰνίγματός τε γὰρ ἰδέα αὕτη ἐστί, τὸ λέγοντα ὑπάρχοντα ἀδύνατα συνάψαι*" (*Poet.* 22, 25—6) ("The essence of a riddle consists in describing a fact by an impossible combination of words.") *Aristotle*, W. H. Fyfe, trans. (Cambridge, MS.,1932), 85.
[71] C. Gulick, trans., 555.
[72] Ibid., 555.

et vehor in caelis et in ipsis ambulo terris. (32.1—3)

I was the cuckolder of a king, but followed wooden limbs.

I am a Cilician mountain, but a mountain in name only.

I ride in the heavens and walk on the earth itself.

Here the ambiguity turns on the fact that, depending on whether it is used as a common or proper noun, the riddle's solution "*taurus*", may refer to several different things—the riddle even tells us that, in some instances, the answer fulfils the clues "nomine solo" (32.2), ("in name only"). The mythological bull transformed into a constellation and the ordinary farmyard animal are both *taurus*—which solves the clue: "vehor in caelis et in ipsis ambulo terris" (32.3) ("I ride in the heavens and walk on the earth itself"). Here, as one of Symphosius' riddle subjects says in another connection, the different entities are "nomine iung[untur] uno" (82.1) ("joined by one name"). The word *taurus* refers to no less than four entities: a generic bull, the mythological bull that coupled with Pasiphae, a constellation, and a mountain range. In the "clues", Symphosius stresses the aspect unique to a particular one of each of the four entities. This makes the riddle as elaborate, complex, and deceptive as possible. For example, "[m]oechus eram regis, sed lignea membra sequebar" (32.1) ("I was the cuckolder of a king but followed wooden limbs") is only true of the bull which coupled with Pasiphae when she hid inside Daedalus' wooden simulacrum. Only the Taurus Mountains are Cilician mountains (32.2). Finally, alone of the four, the constellation *taurus* resides in the sky. There is nothing to unify these disparate elements except that they share the word "*taurus*". There is an additional confusion that the mythological Taurus, Pasiphae's bull, later became the constellation and that, like the mythological creature, the male animal "*taurus*", might also claim "ambulo terris" (32.3) ("I walk on the earth") at one stage in his story. In these latter instances, the clear distinction between the multiple referents is blurred, placing even greater semantic stress on the single signifier *taurus*.

There is an interesting comparison to be made here with a later "bull" riddle, *Riddle 12*, of the *Exeter Book*.[73] In *Riddle 12*, as with *Taurus*, the clues are multiple; they refer to the animal and also to the different products made from the animal, for instance, to wine skins (ll. 5—6) and skin rugs (ll.7—9). But unlike *Taurus*, these clues refer to things with different names. *Taurus* depends on the idea that a single sign can refer to a mélange of seemingly incompatible elements, *Riddle 12* depends on the idea that a mélange of seemingly incompatible signs ("wine-skin", "skin-rug", "beef") can refer to a single element, namely the bull. Regarding all the parts and the products made from the animal as identical, *Riddle 12* is solved, not by the word as sign, but by the word as signifier of the physical matter which makes up the animal.[74]

The contrast between *Taurus* and *Riddle 12* serves to demonstrate Symphosius' delight in abstraction. *Taurus* works entirely in the realm of language, while *Riddle 12* is grounded in an intimate and visceral interest in the physical world and in the specific processes involved in making things. When Symphosius composes a riddle about what one might think was a similarly concrete topic, such as *Vinum in Acetum Conversum*, Symphosius does not engage with the activities and accoutrements of vinegar production but develops a riddle around the various tenses of the verb "to be". Even riddles which take their subject from processed foodstuffs, such as *Beta* and *Perna* initially describe themselves using abstract language clues: the former begins "[t]ota vocor Graece, sed non sum tota Latine" (42.1) ("[w]hole I am called in Greece, but I am not whole in Latin"), the latter begins "[n]obile duco genus magni de gente Catonis" (85.1) ("I come from a noble lineage, from the gens of Cato").

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[73] The collection of riddles in the *Exeter Book* is directly descended from Symphosius' *Aenigmata* and includes translations of some of his riddles.

[74] While most riddlers are relatively consistent in their riddling techniques, it is typical of Symphosius to employ as many, in as much variety, as possible. Symphosius uses a simpler version of *Riddle 12* of the *Exeter Book* in *Testudo,* in which the living tortoise and the lyre made from it after death are regarded as identical, and in *Flagellum*m where the whip asserts "[d]e pecudis dorso pecudes ego terreo cunctas" (66.1) ("I, who come from the animal's back, terrify all animals").

Symphosius' fascination with the word expresses itself in a relatively simple series of puns on "*taurus*". Yet even here Symphosius plays with the relationship between the mythological Taurus both before and after his metamorphosis into a constellation. However, a more complex example of Symphosius' investigation of the matrix between words and names on the one hand, and aetiological myths and ontology on the other, is foregrounded in *Murra*. This riddle operates around two puns. The first is on "*murra*". This is the name both of a mythological woman and of the tree and sap into which, according to myth, she is metamorphosed. A second pun on the word *lacrima,* the word for both a "tear" and for "sap", is intertwined with the first; the latter derived metaphorically from the former. Thus the woman and the tree are designated by the same word, "*murra*", while Myrrha's tears and the sap of the myrrh tree are designated by the same word "*lacrima*". By opening the riddle "De lacrimis et pro lacrimis mea coepit origo" (48.1) ("My birth began from tears and for tears"), Symphosius plays on both puns; he puns on puns. The origin of myrrh, the precious ointment, is from the *lacrimae*, the resin of the myrrh tree. However, its origin is also in the tears (*lacrimae*) wept by Myrrha when she was transformed into the myrrh tree. The play is repeated in the second line in which the riddle subject claims: "ex oculis fluxi, sed nunc ex arbore nascor" (48.2) ("I have flowed from eyes, but now I spring from a tree.") Here tears (*lacrimae*) flow from the eyes of Myrrha and resin (*lacrimae*) flows from the myrrh tree.

The riddle, *Murra*, is dynamic. In the first two lines our understanding of the words, read sometimes with one meaning and then another, are kept in tension. Literally, the pun acts to produce two separate meanings. However, mythologically speaking, there is only one: Myrrha and her tears, and the myrrh tree and myrrh resin are all Myrrha. Yet, no sooner do we resolve the problem by recognizing them as being identical, than Symphosius forces us to separate them again. The final line of the riddle distinguishes the two entities and, by giving each a half line, divides them formally as well: "laetus honor frondis, tristis sed imago doloris" (48.3) ("The happy glory of green boughs, but the sad image of sorrow"). Here Symphosius resolves the entities into a polarity marked by the oppositional qualities of joy and sorrow. Each

half of the line grammatically mirrors the other so that the opposition is clearly expressed in the joyful and highly-prized resin on the one hand, and in Myrrha's grief on the other. Yet, here too, the only way to resolve the paradox is by reading Myrrha and myrrh as identical. And so we are forced to oscillate in our reading again. Like *Taurus* where we also alternate between understanding the four entities as separate and identical, Symphosius keeps our understanding of this riddle, like the riddle subject itself, in metamorphosis.

Conclusion

Since Symphosius' riddles come to us already solved, the interest in reading them is to follow the twists and turns of their logic, allusion, intertext and word play. We must go looking, as I suggested at the beginning, "in scirpo nodum". Symphosius' riddles allow different answers to co-exist and this is reflected on a broader level in that, throughout the *Aenigmata*, Symphosius explores and enacts plurality in as many ways as possible; in his multiple ordering strategies, his multiple riddling strategies, in his juxtaposition of multiple mythic narratives within a single riddle, and finally though the adoption of multiple world views—a new one in each riddle. Symphosius' myriad strategies work in concert in the same way that Symphosius allows other pluralities, such as multiple answers, to remain in non-conflicting juxtaposition. Perhaps most remarkably of all, Symphosius seems to delight in avoiding his own perspective, in favour of those which are alien to him; a true expression of the misrule and reversal of the Saturnalia.

Chapter Two

De Creatura: Aldhelm's Invention of the Creation Riddle

sicut ergo ista contraria contrariis opposita sermonis pulchritudinem
reddunt; ita quadam non verborum, sed rerum eloquentia contrariorum
oppositione saeculi pulchritudo componitur.[1]

——Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 11. 18.

In all probability, it was Aldhelm's admiration that enabled Symphosius' riddles to achieve lasting influence. Modern scholars as well as medieval poets have read and considered Symphosius' *Aenigmata*, not so much for its own sake as from their profound regard for Aldhelm. Aldhelm's earliest known poetic work[2] and sincerest flattery of Symphosius,[3] his collection of *enigmata* was included in the *Epistola Ad Acircium* which was sent to King Aldfrith of Northumbria (685—705).[4] Aldhelm's *Enigmata*,[5] sits between his two metrical treatises *De Metris* and *De Pedum Regulis*[6] and illustrates the principles they outline on the one hand and on the

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[1] ("Just as that opposition of contraries bestows beauty upon language, so the beauty of this world is built upon the opposition of contraries through a certain elegance not of words but of matter.")

[2] E. Thornbury "Aldhelm's Rejection of the Muses and the Mechanics of Poetic Inspiration in Early Anglo-Saxon England" in *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007), 71—92, 72.

[3] Aside from his imitation of Symphosius' *enigmata*, Aldhelm flatteringly describes Symphosius as "Simfosius poeta, versificus metricae artis peritia praeditus" ("the poet Symphosius, endowed with knowledge of metrical skill"). *Aenigmata Aldhelmi* in Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 133, F. Glorie, ed. (Turnhout, 1968), 371.

[4] The identification of Acircius with King Aldfrith is now generally accepted. M. Lapidge *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600—899* (London, 1996), 7.

[5] Please note the slight difference in spelling between the otherwise easily confused *Enigmata* of Aldhelm and *Aenigmata* of Symphosius.

[6] Although the *Enigmata* was apparently sent as part of this larger work, it is possible that it was written earlier. See M. Lapidge and J. Rosier *Aldhelm: the Poetic Works* (Cambridge, 1985), 61.

other is intended to reveal the "enigmata…clandistina" (*præ*. 7) ("secret riddles") of God, to see God "per speculum in enigmate" (I Cor. 13:12) ("through a glass in riddles").[7] The *Enigmata* is made up of one hundred riddles culminating in a final, majestic riddle on Creation.[8] For Lapidge, this riddle, *De Creatura*, is the essence of the collection and the ultimate expression of its purpose. He writes:

> Aldhelm set out to reveal the hidden links between all creation—animate and inanimate—and by means of an intricate web of interlocking themes and metaphors to lead the reader to contemplate God's Creation afresh. Drawing his subjects mainly from Pliny, Isidore, and his own observation of nature, Aldhelm wove them together in the final *enigma* which is "Creation" itself.[9]

As we have seen, riddles inevitably consider and investigate the nature of things. Yet, before Aldhelm, I have been unable to find an example of a riddle on Creation in the riddling traditions that feed into Aldhelm's literary tradition—the Christian, Greek, Latin and Germanic. In a riddle collection that is almost entirely imitative of Symphosius, *De Creatura* is a remarkable and entirely original work. It was so influential that there are no less than three versions of it in the *Exeter Book* and this popularity continued; these three riddles are among the very few from *Exeter Book* to be absorbed into the English folk tradition. Moreover, the conception of *De Creatura* is so strong and its central paradox so ingenious that in the English tradition, to the best of my knowledge, no one ever devises another riddle on Creation. Rather, variations on his central conception abound. This chapter will examine *De Creatura*. It will consider it as a development of the Symphosian century of riddles, and also as expounding an inspired vision of God's universe.

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[7] My own translation.
[8] For a full text see appendix C.
[9] M. Lapidge, 9.

De Creatura and the Symphosian Riddle

Eighth-century ecclesiastical riddle-writers such as Tatwine and Eusebius[10] inherit Symphosius' form through their ardent imitation of Aldhelm. The particularities of Symphosius' form (number of riddles, entitled solutions, type of riddle subject) not to mention the riddle type itself—enigmatic, metaphorical descriptions of everyday things—becomes canonical through Aldhelm. This is evident when we consider that the aspects of Symphosius' collection *not* copied by Aldhelm (for example, uniform number of verses for each riddle) did *not* become canonical.[11] Aldhelm's imitation makes Symphosius the founder of a subgenre rather than merely the author of one of the many unusual texts found in the *Codex Salmasianus*. In accepting Symphosius' "definition" of the riddle over other classical and Biblical models, Aldhelm made Symphosius' riddles definitional. But from the point of view of this chapter, it is not Aldhelm's faithful imitation which is interesting but the ways in which he differs from, and more to the point, develops Symphosius' conception.

Aldhelm does this is in several ways. For one, taking his cue from Symphosius' last few riddles which address intangible subjects like *Echo* (98) and particularly *Somnus* (99), Aldhelm extends into writing riddles on abstract concepts like *De Fato* (7) and *De Fama* (98). Ultimately, such topics were unpopular in terms of the tradition traced in this thesis. Neither later Anglo-Saxon vernacular riddles nor post-Conquest folk riddles show the influence of this aspect of Aldhelm's riddling. However, it was of tremendous contemporary significance. Abstract and especially theological topics became the hallmark of seventh-century clerical riddle writers.[12]

Perhaps the most important difference between Symphosius and Aldhelm, certainly in terms of the continuing Symphosian Tradition, is signalled by the

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[10] Op.Cit., 9.

[11] Like Aldhelm's, Tatwine's riddles are of varying length. Eusebius' riddles are mainly regular, though there is one exception. The later *Exeter Book* riddles also vary in length.

[12] Eusebius writes riddles on such abstract topics as human characteristics including the virtues and vices. The virtues and vices are also the subject of the riddles attributed to Boniface. Tatwine's riddles are the most abstract of all. Their subjects range from philosophy and three-fold death to one particularly abstract riddle on historical, literal, moral, and allegorical interpretations of the Bible.

difference in the ordering of their riddle collections. Symphosius' *Aenigmata*, as we have already seen, is marked by its associative, interlinked, intuitive progression through various topics, carefully grouped to delineate a catalogue of the universe and consequently, also, a view of the world. Aldhelm's riddles promise to follow this lead by beginning with a riddle on the earth and ending with one on the entirety of Creation. However, within this frame the collection seems to wander rather randomly from topic to topic, as a glance at the final five riddle topics immediately preceding *De Creatura* will confirm. These five, *De Elefante* (Elephant), *De Nocte* (Night), *De Fama* (Fame), *De Elleboro* (Hellibore), *De Camelo* (Camel) bear no obvious relationship to each other, especially as they have been ordered, and more importantly provide no introduction to the scope and majesty of *De Creatura*. Aldhelm's collection still acts as a catalogue of the universe—by imitating Symphosius' form it could hardy fail to be such. Yet, the haphazard progression of topics perhaps indicates that this aspect of the endeavour held no particular interest for him—certainly the weight of evidence is against Lapidge and Rosier when they credit Aldhelm, not Symphosius, with "the brilliant idea of casting his cosmology in the form of *enigmata*".[13]

Indeed, Aldhelm's riddles are not always entirely consistent in their cosmology. Some, like *De Crismal*, are overtly Christian in subject matter while others rely so heavily upon allusions to classical mythology that they "do not individually look like Christian poems".[14] This is demonstrated in Aldhelm's treatment of the idea of Fate. In *De Fato*[15] Aldhelm unequivocally corrects what he plainly believes is an unchristian misapprehension. He begins *De Fato* by quoting

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[13] M. Lapidge and J. Rosier, 65—6.

[14] J. Steen *Verse and Virtuosity: the Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry* (Toronto, 2008), 90.

[15] Lapidge and Rosier point out that the riddle makes use of a quotation from Vergil which refers to Fortuna, not Fatum. Further, Aldhelm's use of "domina" implies a female personification, and though the Old English *wyrd* is feminine, the Latin *fatum* (neuter) is not. Lapidge and Rosier feel it so unlikely that Aldhelm would confuse the two that they suggest amending the manuscript from "Fatum" to "Fortuna", see M. Lapidge and J. Rosier, 248—9. If they are correct, it makes Aldhelm's attitude all the more surprising. The concept of Fortuna had largely been reconciled with Christianity by writers such as Boethius so why reject it—but not the Parcae—with such vehemence? For a history of the concept of Fortuna, see J. Frakes *The Fate of Fortune in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 1988).

Vergil's assertion at *Aeneid* 12.677 of the futility of resisting what is decreed: "Quo Deus et quo dura vocat Fortuna; sequamur!" ("where God (Jupiter) and hard Fortune summon, let us follow") only to dismiss it, asserting instead the ruling power of "Christi gratia" ("Christ's grace"):

> Facundum constat quondam cecinisse poetam:
> "Quo Deus et quo dura vocat Fortuna; sequamur!"
> Me veteres falso dominam vocitare solebant,
> Sceptra regens mundi dum Christi gratia regeret. (7.1—4)

> (It is well known that an eloquent poet once sang:
> "where God and where hard Fortune calls, let us follow!"
> The ancients were falsely accustomed to call me mistress,
> Ruling the sceptres of the world until Christ's grace shall rule.)

Yet in *De Fuso*, Aldhelm's spindle declares "[p]er me fata virum dicunt decernere Parcas" (45.6—7) ("through me, they say, the Parcae decide the fates of men"). Here Aldhelm seems content to restrict his criticism of pagan notions of Fate to the casual disbelief implied by his use of the word "dicunt". Of course it is difficult to know exactly what cultural context Aldhelm was writing to since the significance of Fate (*wyrd*) to the Anglo-Saxons is a source of considerable controversy amongst scholars. Fifty years ago, Stanley argued that it was a primarily Christian concept in England.[16] This view has been influential, though there are those who recognize "pagan, Germanic *wyrd*"[17] in the almost proverbial pronouncements on Fate common in Anglo-Saxon literature. I am most persuaded by those scholars who perceive a more complex cultural negotiation in progress. Weil sees a dialogue

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[16] In fact he goes further, arguing that the idea of Fate was introduced in England by Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*. Because all our Anglo-Saxon texts date from after Christianization there is not much evidence upon which to debate such a point. I would, however, point to the popularity of *wyrd* in the extant literature as suggestive of the concept being a congenial and familiar one. If Stanley is right and the concept of Fate was entirely absent from Anglo-Saxon culture before Christianity, theirs is the only culture of which I am aware to have such an absence. See E. Stanley *The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (Cambridge, 1964), 94.

[17] L. Beaston "The Wanderer's Courage" in *Neophilologus* 89 (2005), 119—37, 120.

between pagan and Christian conceptions[18] and Pollack points to the "syncretism inherent in much of Old English literature".[19] Certainly Fate is a common *topos* in Anglo-Saxon literature—think, for example of *Beowulf*'s "[g]æð a wyrd swa hio scel" (*Beowulf*, l. 455), ("fate will always go as it must") or *The Wanderer*'s "wyrd byð ful aræd" (*The Wanderer*, l. 5) ("fate is wholly inexorable") or the *Cotton Maxims*' "wyrd byð swiðost" (*Maxims II*, l. 5), ("fate is the strongest").[20] Stanley feels certain that these poets understand *wyrd* in an exclusively Christian way.[21] Even if this is the case I suggest that the prevalence of the idea indicates that it resonated with pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon culture—a suggestion compatible with the image of Christianity supplanting a belief in Fate in *De Fato*.[22] In any event, the lack of ambiguity in Aldhelm's rejection of Fate in *De Fato* indicates that he felt the idea was potentially dangerous in a society in which the position of Christianity was still so precarious. Why then treat the idea so mildly in *De Fuso* which is, in many ways, the more problematic of the two riddles? This kind of incongruity is present throughout the *Engimata*. Aldhelm's love of classical literature results in countless allusions and infuses them with reality, while his pedagogical instincts oblige him first to expound them, then to correct their heresy. This rather endearing fastidiousness has the effect on occasion of wrong-footing the audience; Steen notes, without the *præfatio* to give the *Enigmata* an unequivocally Christian purpose, a coherent cosmology does not readily emerge.[23]

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[18] Weil notes an etymological link between words for "fate" and for God. These revolve around the verb "to shape" from which is derived *gescipe*, "destiny" and *Sceppend*, "the Shaper, God". Weil argues that this suggests older religious ideas permeated the conception of the Christian God, see S. Weil "Grace under Pressure: "Hand-Words," "Wyrd," and Free Will" in *Beowulf*" in *Pacific Coast Philology* 24 (1989), 94—104, 94.

[19] S. Pollack "Engendering *Wyrd*: Notional Gender Encoded in the Old English Poetic and Philosophical Vocabulary" in *Neophilologus* 90 (2006), 643—661, 645.

[20] This line has been the centre of heated debate because it is juxtaposed with the line "þrymmas syndan Cristes myccle" (*Maxims II*, l. 4) ("Christ's powers are great"). Stanley sees the reference to *wyrd* as an elaboration on the greatness of Christ's powers, but given the poem's structure—a litany of discrete pronouncements on a range of topics—the line could equally suggest that the two propositions are in competition.

[21] E. Stanley, 114.

[22] Aldhelm is, of course, referring to classical, not Germanic paganism here. However, as we shall see, Aldhelm often discusses classical paganism as a means of indirectly discussing Anglo-Saxon paganism. Perhaps this is particularly likely in this case since, although the Romans certainly thought of Fate as a powerful force, they do not given it the pre-eminent position that Aldhelm imagines here.

[23] J. Steen, 90.

Steen might also have noted that the function she attributes to the *præfatio* is performed again at the other end of the collection by *De Creatura*. Having shored his text with the pillars of the *præfatio* and *De Creatura* at opposite ends of the work, Aldhelm does not need (as Symphosius does) to devise a precise and complex ordering of his riddles in order to express his world view or advance his understanding of the nature of things; he distils it all into *De Creatura*. Symphosius' entire cosmology and ideology is expressed in the subtle matrix of relationships between the individual riddles, their neighbours and the collection as a whole. But for Aldhelm, it is given full, complex and triumphant expression in his final, monumental riddle. In making his *Enigmata* an expression of cosmology, Aldhelm is very much following Symphosius' lead. However, there has been considerable resistance amongst modern scholars to seeing Symphosius' collection as an ideological statement of equivalent weight to that of Aldhelm's *Enigmata* and especially of *De Creatura*. Lapidge betrays his preconception of the superiority of a high-minded Christian poet over a dilettante pagan when he insists that, "[i]n view of the seriousness of Aldhelm's theme"[24] we should talk of Symphosius' *Riddles* and Aldhelm's *Mysteries*. Here Lapidge suggests we translate what is in effect a genre term differently in Aldhelm's case. Yet Aldhelm, who is generally so scrupulous to note and correct points upon which he could be accused of impiously assimilating the profane to the sacred, shows no sign of believing either the Riddle genre or the word *enigmata* unsuitable. The title he inherits from Symphosius, *enigmata*, he uses of his own work and also, more significantly, to refer to the profound but hidden truths of God. Perhaps the distinction then belongs to modern scholars and not to Aldhelm or his contemporaries.

Aldhelm's distillation of Symphosius' century into a single riddle is important in two crucial ways. First, the fact of achieving in a single riddle what Symphosius has done over the span of a hundred is in itself an expression of world view. *De Creatura* is a more monofocal vision; the world seen in single point

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[24] M. Lapidge, 9.

perspective, eminently suitable for expressing a unified Christian view. Secondly, true to his word, Aldhelm has written a collection of riddles literally *causa metri*—the reader will forgive my misappropriation of the expression. The primary function of most of his riddles and the focus of their didactic intent is to aid students in Latin metrical composition. Aldhelm presents this aim as identical with expounding the divine mysteries of God; a natural idea given that fluency in Latin is the means to virtue for an Anglo-Saxon cleric. Latin was the language of the Bible for the Anglo-Saxons and of many other key Christian texts and therefore the vehicle of Christian understanding. Yet, riddles like *De Fato* (see above) demonstrate that the two aims are not entirely united. Indeed, in most of his riddles Aldhelm reveals himself to be more concerned sometimes with one aim, sometimes with the other. Thus, by exploring the divine mysteries in the framing poems, the *præfatio* and *De Creatura*, Aldhelm vouchsafes himself the freedom to become distracted by metrics in between.

Before turning to a consideration of *De Creatura* itself, it is worth briefly discussing two riddles, *De Terra* (Earth) and *De Natura* (Nature), both of which impinge on the same material as *De Creatura*, though without its grand scope. In neither do we encounter the kind of inconsistency that exists between *De Fuso* and *De Fato* but they do add weight to the proposition that Aldhelm does not ascribe equal importance to all his riddles. He is far less concerned to delineate his world view here than in *De Creatura* which he seems to regard as a more profound riddle. For example, in *De Terra* he claims:

> Altrix cunctorum, quos mundus gestat, in orbe
>
> Nuncupor (et merito, quia numquam pignora tantum
>
> Improba sic lacerant maternas dente papillas)
>
> Prole virens aestate, tabescens tempore brumae. (1.1—4.)

> I am called the nourisher of all things in my sphere which the world bears
>
> (and deservedly, because wicked children never so torment

their mother's breasts with their teeth.)

I am vigorous with offspring in summer, in winter-time I waste away.

Nothing here contradicts *De Creatura*. However, when in *De Creatura* Creation makes an absolute claim for itself (such as the earth's assumption of the title "Altrix cunctorum") Aldhelm is almost obsessively careful to stress that such power is within the context of a greater subjugation to God. In the more majestic *De Creatura*, the qualifying "in orbe" would not be sufficient. Similarly, in *De Natura*, significant authority is assigned to the riddle subject without even a mention of God:

Crede mihi, res nulla manet sine me moderante

Et frontem faciemque meam lux nulla videbit.

Quis nesciat dicione mea convexa rotari

Alta poli solisque iubar lunaeque meatus?

Believe me, nothing remains without my guidance,

and no eye shall see my face and shape.

Who does not know that by my command turn the convex

heights of heaven, the radiance of the sun and the courses of the moon?

Here nature almost boasts of its authority, which extends even to the heavens, the dwelling of God. By contrast, in *De Creatura* God charges Creation to guide and rule all the created world; whatever authority Creation assumes is only "dum pater arcitenens concessit" (l.19), ("provided the bow-wielding Father allows").

Of all Aldhelm's riddles, *De Creatura* is his definitive statement of cosmology. It is his most significant development of the Symphosian Riddle, and also his most influential. It was the source of the greatest number of Anglo-Saxon imitations and elicits the most modern scholarly interest. More broadly, it profoundly crystallizes the essence of the Riddle genre. Riddles probe, discuss, understand and define the infinite and the finite. Because a riddle plays the essential

nature of the riddle-subject against the human perception of it, it is inevitably concerned with the nature of Creation, whether in a grand philosophical way or implicitly through its articulation of the miraculous in the mundane. Aldhelm's Creation Riddle encapsulates what is essential in the nature of all riddles.

The Paradox and Cosmology of *De Creatura*

De Creatura gives exuberant expression to a teeming, vibrant universe. It is the finest instance of the disposition noted by Lapidge and Rosier who comment that "Aldhelm's universe is in a continual process of gestation, birth and growth" and further that "[b]irth in the *Enigmata* is a dynamic process in which the whole of creation—animate and inanimate—participates".[25] It offers an all encompassing miscellany of images. Nothing is above or beneath the poet's notice. Nectar, Chinese silk, worms, eagles, dung, curling irons, books, frost, feathers, flint, incense, golden bosses, crystal balls, lilies, offal and even the enigmatic and abstractly cosmographical *six* zones[26] of the world all find their place. Unlike the later Old English riddle writers, Aldhelm draws on the imagery of man-made objects as often as natural imagery. Aldhelm is distinguished as the only Creation Riddle writer (perhaps the only English poet) who does not implicitly separate humanity from the created world. Even Symphosius, whose unhierarchical riddles do not assume human superiority, sets humanity apart. The humans of *De Creatura* are simply another detail of Creation. Surprisingly, there is no sense of the overlordship God accords humanity in *Genesis* which grants us "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26). Rather, in *De Creatura* the responsibility of guardianship belongs to Creation itself which claims lovingly "ego complector sub caeli cardine cuncta" (l. 8), ("I embrace all things beneath the pole of heaven") and further asserts:

Omnia, quaeque polo sunt subter et axe reguntur,

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[25] This disposition is born out by sheer weight of imagery; "[n]early one third of the *Enigmata* contain an explicit reference to birth". M. Lapidge and J. Rosier, 64.

[26] For a full discussion of this, see Chapter 3.

Dum pater arcitenens concessit, jure guberno. (ll.18—9)

(All things which are under the sky and guided by heaven,
while the bow-wielding Father allows, I rule by right.)

De Creatura's extraordinary miscellany of images is unified by a paradox; for at the heart of every riddle is a trick, a device—and it is this which makes it a riddle. This device may be as profound as a paradox or as superficial as a pun and it determines a riddle's focus and more importantly, in which aspect of the subject a riddle will find the miraculous in the mundane. Riddle devices, like narrative types, are reused by different authors or folk performers in different situations. During this process they may be embellished in any number of ways but the device remains the same. Borthwick, for example, traces a riddle device referring to a tortoise from Ancient Greece to Enlightenment Italy (see above),[27] while Hill traces one referring to time from antiquity to Tolkien.[28] Hill observes that a riddle adapts so that it becomes typical of the society which tells it and yet it is fundamentally the same riddle because the riddle device remains unchanged.[29] Most subjects have given rise to more than one riddle device; for example, Symphosius' Bell riddle (*Tintinnabulum*), which revolves around the bell being sometimes noisy and sometimes silent, is not the same as the sixteenth-century bell riddle of *Riddles of Heraclitus and Democritus* which derives its ambiguity from describing the bell in human terms.[30] However, the subject of Creation has only ever inspired one device, the one Aldhelm invents in his *Enigmata*. Aldhelm's basic device exists (with minor variations) in every Creation Riddle in the Symphosian tradition.

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[27] See E. Borthwick "The Riddle of the Tortoise and the Lyre" in *Music and Letters*, 51 (1970), 373—87.

[28] See T. Hill "Saturn's Time Riddle: An Insular Latin Analogue for *Solomon and Saturn II* Lines 282—291" in *Review of English Studies*, New Series, 39 (1988), 273—76.

[29] Ibid., 75.

[30] The riddle runs, "There is a bodie without a hart, that hath a toong, and yet no head;/ Buried it was, ere it was made, and lowde it speaks, and yet is dead." Anon. *Riddles of Heraclitus and Democritus* (London, 1598), reprinted in M. Bryant *Riddles, Ancient and Modern* (London, 1983), 165.

So what is this extraordinary paradox? *De Creatura* is built around a series of antitheses, each of which Creation, the riddle subject, surpasses. The paradox of *De Creatura* is that Creation includes and transcends every paradox and embodies every contradiction. Aldhelm describes Creation as all its constituent parts and as a single entity simultaneously, and so attributes to it every quality in existence. More than that, Creation exhibits each quality to a greater degree than the chosen exemplar. It is not only that Creation is both hot and cold; it is hotter than a forge *and* colder than hoar frost. So rather than being simply an Oppositional Riddle[31] ("what is hot and cold?") it is more complexly both an Oppositional and a Comparative Riddle: ("what could be hotter than a forge and colder than hoar frost?") *De Creatura* constantly extends and exceeds every extreme and every contradiction and in so doing "embraces the multitude of the world's riddles".[32]

The Oppositional nature of *De Creatura* separates it, not only from Aldhelm's other riddles in the *Enigmata*, but also from Symphosius' riddles. In the main, Symphosius and Aldhelm compose Nonoppositional Riddles. That is to say, they compose riddles which derive their ambiguity either from describing their subject selectively so as to juxtapose incongruous characteristics, or from describing it metaphorically so as to misdirect the guesser. Such riddles are perfectly suited to

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[31] An Oppositional Riddle is a riddle which describes its subject in contradictory terms. It is the antithesis of a Nonoppositional Riddle which describes its subject partially or enigmatically but without introducing a contradictory or apparently "impossible" element. Georges and Jones distinguish three subsets of the Oppositional Riddle divided by the kind of contradiction employed. The first, Antithetical Contradictives, form a paradox by describing two elements in direct contradiction. The second, Privational Contradictive, are formed by "[d]enial of an associated part" (99); to use Georges and Jones' example, "what has hands but no fingers? [answer: clock]" (99). The third kind is a Causal Contradictive in which the contradiction derives from a described condition failing to produce its inevitable result. Again, to use Georges and Jones' example, "what eats and eats and never gets full? [answer: a sausage grinder]" (100). For a fuller definition of Oppositional and Nonoppositional Riddles, see R. Georges and M. Jones, *Folkloristics* (Bloomington, 1995), 98—100.

[32] J. Steen, 99. *De Creatura* mainly consists of Antithetical Contradictive and Causal Contradictive Oppositional elements, though the description of the curling locks (see below) could be regarded as a Privational Contradictive element. Nonoppositional elements are scarcer. However, the description of Creation as "Senis, ecce, plagis, latus qua panditur orbis,/ Ulterior multo tendor, mirabile fatu" (ll. 61—2), (See! Than the six zones by which the globe is spread out, I am stretched much farther, marvellous to tell") stands outside an opposition and so, as a direct but implausible description might be regarded as a Nonoppositional element. By such a reading, Steen's comment that *Creatura* contains the "multitude of the world's riddles" might be said to be literarily true, at least from the point of view of Structuralist Folkloristics!

Symphosius and Aldhelm because they emphasize the unnoticed yet remarkable characteristics of the mundane. But, as I have said, *De Creatura*, breaks the mould, even of Aldhelm's other riddles. In building *De Creatura* around a single genuine paradox Aldhelm reverts to a pre- or extra-Symphosian kind of riddle that anticipates future English riddling. If it is true to say that Symphosius diverted the genre into a highly idiosyncratic channel, this is the point at which it begins to make its return to the riddling main stream. Symphosius' highly complex, intricate, enigmatic descriptions do not lend themselves to the folk memory nor invite folk adaptations. But a conception as strong, unified and brilliant as that of *De Creatura*, at once so subtle and so simple, does.

Not content with thus breaking the mould, Aldhelm introduces a further radical and ingenious innovation which reconceives the Oppositional Riddle genre itself. As noted above, most Oppositional Riddles use language to deceive the guesser into believing in a false contradiction, as in the famous riddle from the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* quoted in the previous chapter.[33] But in *De Creatura* the contradictory claims made for the riddle subject are not a linguistic slight of hand. Each is perfectly true of Creation.[34] This is the real trick; all the contradictions are actually *true*, they are not the product of deceptive language. The trick is there is no trick. For the first time we have a riddle we may take at its word! Yet, even this underestimates Aldhelm's achievement in *De Creatura*. *De Creatura* recognizes that Creation is an unfathomable riddle in itself, and that there can be no greater riddle than a description of Creation in plain terms.

Aldhelm's central conception, that Creation encompasses all paradoxes, is brilliantly simple and highly original. But its execution is more complex. The

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[33] See 19. "The ones we caught we left behind, the ones we missed we carry." M. West, trans., 350. The language encourages the reader to assume a contradiction which has not actually been stated; how can one take away what one does not have? But of course, on closer inspection we find that the riddle never claimed that the thing was not in the carrier's possession, only that he did not *catch* it. This is a trick of language and expectation, a way of playing a colloquial use of language against its literal meaning.

[34] Steen has described "[e]ach assertion is a hyperbole" but there is no exaggeration in this riddle. J. Steen, 99.

riddle's opening establishes many of the characteristics of the whole. *De Creatura* begins:

> Conditor, aeternis fulcit qui saecla columnis,
>
> Rector regnorum, frenans et fulmina lege,
>
> Pendula dum patuli vertuntur culmina caeli,
>
> Me varium fecit, primo dum conderet orbem. (ll. 1—4)

> (The Founder, who supports the ages with eternal columns
>
> Ruler of the kingdoms, restraining lightening bolts with His law,
>
> While the suspended heights of the wide-reaching skies revolve,
>
> Made me manifold, until first He founded the globe.)

Here Aldhelm perceives Creation as defined by its relationship with the Creator. This opening tells of the Creation of Creation, the cosmography of Creation and that Creation, first and foremost, is "varium" ("manifold").

The next lines of the poem introduce the riddle's main device, the paradox that Creation *is* every paradox. Aldhelm's first opposition is vigilance/sleep. Apparently echoing Symphosius' phrase "sua lumina claudit" (Symp. 99.3) ("close his own eyes") from *Somnus*,[35] Aldhelm writes:

> Pervigil excubiis: numquam dormire iuvabit,
>
> Sed tamen extemplo clauduntur lumina somno (ll. 5—6)

> (Ever vigilant at the watch; never shall it be my pleasure to sleep,
>
> Nevertheless, immediately, my eyes are closed with sleep.)

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[35] Vergil's description of the death of Orodes as a "somnus", ("sleep") in which "in aeternam clauduntur lumina noctem" (*Aen.* 10.754) ("in eternal night the lights [of this eyes] are closed") is also usually cited as a source for this passage in Aldhelm.

This dichotomy presumably occupies such a prominent place in part because of its importance in the Bible where it distinguishes the good Christian from the bad.[36] It is the dichotomy illustrated in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1—13). In Mark 13:36—7 the faithful are commanded to watch "ne cum venerit repente inveniat vos dormientes; quod autem vobis dico omnibus dico vigilate" ("Lest coming on a sudden, He find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch.") St. Paul writes "hora est iam nos de somno surgere nunc enim propior est nostra salus quam cum credidimus" ("it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep. For now our salvation is nearer than when we believed.") (Rom. 13:11) and St Peter, having been rebuked by Jesus for sleeping in Matthew 26:41, "vigilate et orate ut non intretis in temptationem" ("Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation"), commands us "sobrii estote et vigilate" ("be sober and watch") (1Pet. 5:8).[37] So, while *De Creatura* is dominated by physical dichotomies, it begins with a spiritual one—though Aldhelm describes sleep and vigilance as though they are a "physical" dichotomy and makes no attempt to elucidate its Biblical significance. If anything he allows the martial overtones implicit in the word *excubia* to come to the fore. It has also been suggested[38] that this passage echoes Vergil's description of Orodes' death in the *Aeneid*, an allusion which would further reinforce military associations: "olli dura quies oculos et ferreus urget/ somnus, in aeternam clauduntur lumina noctem" (Ver. *Aen.* 10.745—6) ("to him cruel peace and inexorable sleep bears down upon his eyes, their light cut off in eternal night"). It is surprising that the riddles descended from *De Creatura* do not adopt this opening gambit. Vigilance/sleep dichotomy did not prove resonant and was abandoned.

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[36] And in part, perhaps, because of a misremembering of Augustine's comments on enigmata. At *De Trinitate* 15.9, Augustine claims that an enigma is a kind of allegory, so that while all enigmata are allegories not all allegories are enigmata. He illustrates this point with a quotation from 1 Thessalonians 5:6—8 which, he claims, is an allegory but crucially *not* an enigma. This quotation is to do with vigilance and sleep and is the first example given by Augustine after broaching the topic of enigmata. Perhaps this proximity inextricably linked enigmata and the vigilance/sleep dichotomy in Aldhelm's mind. Or, since Augustine says that only the very dull-witted could be so confused about the allegory's meaning as to think it a riddle, Aldhelm is making a gentle joke at his own expense!

[37] The First Epistle of Peter is no longer thought to have been written by Saint Peter, though it was in Aldhelm's time.

[38] A. Orchard "Sources for Enigma 100 (L.A.1.2.100)", 1999, *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register*, http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/, accessed July 2008.

Aldhelm's next manoeuvre is curious. Just as the litany of opposites begins (ll. 5—6), it is interrupted by his *non sequitur* insistence that God stands outside this order:

> Nam Deus ut propria mundum dicione gubernat,
> Sic ego complector sub caeli cardine cuncta. (ll. 7—8)

> (For as God governs the universe with His own rule,
> so I embrace all things beneath the pole of heaven.)

How this follows from an at once vigilant and soporiferous Creation is not apparent. This interjection aside, he moves to the next dichotomy:

> Segnior est nullus, quondam me larbula terret,
> Setigero rursus constans audacior apro. (ll. 9—10)

> (Nothing is more lethargic, at one time a ghost terrifies me,
> On the other hand, standing firm I am braver than a bristly boar.)

This dichotomy follows on from the vigilance/sleep dichotomy. It opposes inactivity and activity, but this time in a physical rather than "spiritual" context. It also amplifies the martial undertone by making the qualities of cowardice/courage the subject of the opposition. This in turn leads to the interjectory repetition that God is greater than His Creation:

> Nullus me superat cupiens vexilla triumphi
> Ni Deus, aethrali summus qui regnat in arce. (ll. 11—12)

> (No one coveting the banners of victory overcomes me
> Except God who reigns on high in His Heavenly citadel.)

As we have seen, this point has already been well-made by Aldhelm. Yet twice in the space of eight lines he interrupts himself to reassert that the power of God stands outside Creation. This interruption is repeated again towards the end of the poem:

Infra me suprave nihil per saecula constat
Ni rerum genitor mundum sermone coercens. (ll. 63—4)

(Nothing stands in the world beneath nor above me,
Except the Creator of all things governing the world with His word.)

Thus, the riddle is dominated by Aldhelm's concern to clarify the ancient theological issue of God's relationship to His own Creation. The martial imagery with which Aldhelm begins the riddle suggests that this relationship, though essentially benevolent, has the possibility of becoming hostile. It also suggests that the world is similarly conflicted. We might see this tension prefigured in the first riddle of the *Enigmata*, *De Terra*, by the analogous relationship between the nurturer and the nurtured; the wicked children bite the breast that feeds them (see above). Neither the relationship between Creator and created, nor the notion that it *is* conflicted proves popular with later vernacular versions of the riddle. The urgency, then, of Aldhelm's repeated insistence that God is in all senses beyond His Creation must be understood in terms of the culture war fought in England in this period to establish Christianity over Anglo-Saxon religion(s). Three hundred years later we find the same insistence in a clergyman like Ælfric; "twa ðing syndon an is scyppend oðer is gesceaft" (*De Fide* 1. 20, 17) ("these are two things; one is the Creator, the other is Creation"). However, the fact that it is not reflected in the later riddles of the *Exeter Book* suggests that Aldhelm was not mistaken in the difficulty of this idea for the general populace.

When Aldhelm writes in the riddle's opening that God "me varium fecit", ("made me manifold") he demonstrates an apparently Symphosian influence.

However, in the following discussion we will see that Aldhelm is not expressing a Symphosian world view at all. Rather, *De Creatura* envisions the multiplicity of Creation ordered by a series of dualities ruled by a restraining God, who curbs even lightening with His law (l. 2). The dualism of Aldhelm's conception of Creator and created is mirrored in the very form of the riddle's paradox, the litany of dichotomies. These dichotomies are inevitably expressive of an ideology in which one of the terms is privileged over the other. For while *De Creatura* has several relatively neutral oppositions such as "Sum gravior plumbo: scopulorum pondera vergo;/ Sum levior pluma, cedit cui tippula limphae" (ll.40—1), ("I am heavier than lead, I incline to the weight of rocks; I am lighter than a feather, to which a pond skater concedes"), there is a tendency towards oppositions in which Aldhelm's distastes reveal themselves. Aldhelm's dichotomies resolve themselves into positives and negatives, as in "Pulchrior auratis, dum fulget fibula, bullis,/ Horridior ramnis et spretis vilior algis" (ll.25—6), ("More beautiful than the gilt bosses on a shining brooch, more unkempt than brambles, viler than despised seaweed"). The strength of the dislike evident in Aldhelm's description of the seaweed has a moralistic edge which is rather remarkable for a modern audience to whom seaweed is not generally so repulsive!

This aspect of Aldhelm's riddling is a new addition to the Symphosian tradition. For although Symphosius is occasionally negative in his characterisation of an animal it is not part of a dichotomizing conception of the world in which one element in the pair is preferred over the other. Symphosius describes Creation in a hundred tiny facets, some of which are more beneficial or congenial to humans than others. But since humanity is by no means accepted as the measure of things and since the riddles are not written from a human perspective, there is no implication of moral worth or turpitude. The characteristic of *De Creatura* is arguably an inevitable consequence of Aldhelm's distillation of the Symphosian century of riddles. In presenting the world in a hundred facets, Symphosius truly imagines Creation made "varium" and, as we have seen, his ordering of the subjects implies a circular, not hierarchical structure. He makes no attempt to place the subjects in any

sort of a dynamic, let alone a dualistic one. By contrast, Aldhelm has focused its infinite variety into a single, unified series of dualistic binaries, each side of which naturally tends towards a (moral) extreme.

In some instances, Aldhelm's dichotomies speak to a quite specific set of cultural and religious values. Indeed, sometimes they are so topical that his meaning has not been apparent to later audiences[39] who do not share the particular concerns of Aldhelm's time. Ever alert for opportunities to Christianize the religiously precarious England, Aldhelm never misses an opening to further his cause. For example, within *De Creatura* Aldhelm includes an apparently surprising dichotomy: crimped/unadorned hair. There is a precedent for the motif in Symphosius' *Pila*: "non sum cincta comis et non sum compta capillis" (Symp. 59.1), ("I am not framed with locks nor am I adorned with hair"). Symphosius is merely making the most of the notion of the ball's stuffing as a kind of "anti-hair" which grows inwards instead of outwards. But, for Aldhelm the image of crimped versus unadorned hair has a particular significance in relation to the cardinal sin of vanity. His most famous and important work, the prose *De Virginitate* devotes considerable space to questions of dress. In it Aldhelm contrasts the vanity of elaborate hair styles with the virtue revealed by simple ones.[40] In particular, he is critical of those whose "antiae frontis et temporum cincinni calamistro crispantur", ("locks on the forehead and ringlets at the temples are curled with a curling iron"). We note the language echoes in *De Creatura*:

> Cincinnos capitis nam gesto cacumine nullos,
>
> Ornent qui frontem pompis et tempora setis,
>
> Cum mihi caesaries volitent de vertice crispae,
>
> Plus calamistratis se comunt quae calamistro. (ll. 44—7)

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[39] This includes later, Anglo-Saxon audiences if *Riddle 40*, the vernacular translation of *Creatura*, is any measure.

[40] For a general discussion see H. Mayr-Harting *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia, 1991), 194. For a discussion of Anglo-Saxon attitudes to dress, see G. Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2004)

(I bear no ringlets from the top of my head which would adorn
my forehead with a fringe and my temples with bristles. As
curly flowing hair flutters on my crown, it is more adorned with
curls than [it would be] with a curling iron.)

So this dichotomy must be understood within the wider context of a debate within
seventh and eighth century England.[41] In one sense it does not fit quite comfortably
within the parameters of the framework of *De Creatura* which, with the exception of
the opening vigilance/sleep dichotomy, usually confines itself to the physical rather
than "spiritual" characteristics of Creation. Indeed, these two "spiritual"
dichotomies are treated as though they *are* about physical traits. Possibly because of
this, the Old English translation of *De Creatura* three hundred years later
misunderstands, or perhaps "resolves", the image of the locks into the physical
dichotomy of baldness and hirsuteness.

In fact, most of Aldhlem's dichotomies can be understood in terms of a
"ruling" high/low contrast. The disposition to privilege one term over another
characteristically expresses itself in the contrast between the heavenly heights and
infernal depths. There is a tendency for the positive side of Aldhelm's dichotomies
to be associated with height, while the negative side is associated with the low. This
disposition is particularly apparent in the opposition between the fast and the slow
which occurs just before the halfway mark of the poem. Each of the exemplars of
speed belongs high in the heavens:

Plus pernix aquilis, Zephiri velocior alis,
Necnon accipitre properantior (ll. 35—6)

(More fleet than eagles, swifter than the wings of Zephyrus

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[41] J. Blair *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), 113., G. Owen-Crocker, *Dress in
Anglo-Saxon England*, B. Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (Leicester, 2003),
147. This is attested by the extent of Bede and Aldhelm's writing on the subject. Nor was it solved
within Aldhelm's lifetime. Issues of dress feature in the correspondence of Boniface and Archbishop
Cuthbert and are mentioned in the 747 *Clofesho* canons.

And indeed, quicker than a hawk)

By contrast, the slow are lowly in every sense:

> …horrens
>
> Lumbricus et limax et tarda testudo palustris
>
> Atque, fimi soboles sordentis, cantarus ater
>
> Me dicto citius vincunt certamine cursus. (ll. 36—9)

> (…the horrid
>
> Earthworm and the snail and the slow swamp-turtle
>
> And the black beetle, offspring of vile dung
>
> Excel me running in a race quicker than the telling.)

The contempt and disgust with which Aldhelm writes of the slow, earthbound creatures suggests that he has been drawn into delineating a different dichotomy from the fast/slow dichotomy originally projected. The true dichotomy here seems to be between the heavens, and the glorious, swift graceful creatures which belong in such a realm on the one hand, and earth and the filthy, slow and repulsive creatures which burrow in the dirt on the other. This association runs through the riddle. We find it again in the opposition between the whale and the worm: "[g]randior in glaucis ballena fluctibus atra/ Et minor exiguo, sulcat qui corpora, verme" ("larger than a black whale in the grey waves, and smaller than the meagre worm which gnaws through corpses"). The worm is associated with the disturbing decomposition of death and the description of the whale as *atra*, which in addition to "black" also implies "terrible", "deadly", "squalid", and "unlucky", is used particularly in connection with the underworld. This dichotomy is especially telling in that it is expressed in terms of creatures that both live in depths of one kind or another and are equally subject to Aldhelm's dislike.

In addition to informing Aldhelm's dichotomies, the high/low opposition maps the "imaginary geography" of *De Creatura*: "Altior, en, caelo rimor secreta Tonantis/ Et tamen inferior terris tetra Tartara cerno" (ll. 21—2), ("behold! Higher than Heaven, I explore the secrets of the Thunderer and yet, lowlier than the earth, I examine foul Hell"). This imagery dominates the poem. As we might expect, God is associated with heights. He is described in the poem's opening as existing in the heavens and a few lines later we are told that God "aethrali summus… regnat in arce." (l. 12), ("reigns on high in His Heavenly citadel"). The ever-present distinction between Creator and created is expressly understood through the high/low dichotomy. Creation describes itself specifically as including everything lower than God: "Sic ego complector sub caeli cardine cuncta" (l. 7), ("so I embrace all things beneath the pole of heaven") at the beginning of the riddle. A few lines later Creation claims "Omnia, quaeque polo sunt subter et axe reguntur,/ Dum pater arcitenens concessit, jure guberno" (ll.18—9), ("all things which are under the sky and guided by heaven, provided the bow-wielding Father allows, I rule by right"). It is reiterated again towards the end of *De Creatura* (see below).

Aldhelm's literary and imaginative investigation of the limits of Creation is focused on a vertical axis. This is not to say that he ignores the horizontal axis— early in the poem he writes: "Latior, en, patulis terrarum finibus exto" (l. 27) ("behold! I stretch out broader than the wide-spreading ends of the earth"). Nevertheless, images involving the horizontal axis carry far less imaginative weight and are allotted far less space in the poem. Moreover, Aldhelm always slightly shifts the emphasis. For example, in the poem's only other reference to the horizontal we read:

> Ut globus astrorum plasmor teres atque rotunda
> Sperula seu pilae necnon et forma cristalli;
> Et versa vice protendor ceu Serica pensa
> In gracilem porrecta panum seu stamina pepli.
> Senis, ecce, plagis, latus qua panditur orbis,

Ulterior multo tendor, mirabile fatu (ll. 57—62)

(I am made smooth and round like the orb of the stars

Or even a globe of a ball or a crystal sphere.

And, on the other hand, I am extended out just like Chinese silk

Stretched out in a slender thread or the fibres of a garment.

See! Than the six zones by which the globe is spread out,

 I am stretched much farther, marvellous to tell!)

When Creation imagines itself stretching horizontally like a thread, it is opposed, not to an image of narrowness (as later riddles did), but to an image of circularity. This conception is far more sophisticated and complex than in the vernacular riddles. It opposes an apparently infinite straight line to an infinite curved line, a circle in an almost a geometrical, mathematical opposition rather than an expression of the horizontal axis. Further shifting away from the horizontal, the tactile immediacy of the different materials, the delicate, evanescent silk and the smooth, hard crystal, establishes a secondary, competing dichotomy. Ultimately and inevitably, in the very next line, our eyes are drawn back to the vertical again:

Infra me suprave nihil per saecula constat

Ni rerum genitor mundum sermone coercens (ll. 63—4)

Nothing stands in the world beneath nor above me,

Except the Creator of all things governing the world with His word.

Aldhelm's attitude to the horizontal axis even pervades his grammar; the passage dealing with the horizontal axis (lines 57—62) is uncharacteristically passive. Aldhelm first uses the first person singular passive in line 28, *concludor*, "I am confined", to convey his original image of wide/narrow: "in media concludor parte pugilli" (l. 28), ("I am confined in the middle of a fist"). The next thirty lines

are dominated (as is the rest of the poem) by active verbs until the horizontal opposition at lines 57—62. Suddenly, the text is dominated by passives: *plasmor* ("I am formed"), *protendor* ("I am stretched out") and *tendor* ("I am stretched") and even the third person form, *panditur* ("it is spread out"). But, it is the first person singular passives which are so distinctive and so intriguing because Aldhelm's overall conception of Creation is marked by dynamic action. Creation soars swifter than eagles, hawks and even fleet Zephyrus, consumes more than Cyclopes, burns hotter than flames and shines brighter than Titan's orb. Aldhelm's Creation boasts of the feats it has undertaken at God's behest, such as the guarding and guiding of all things beneath Heaven. The dynamism of the conception proved so luminous for the imaginations of later poets that they exceeded it in their reworkings until Creation is envisioned as possessing such agency and energy that it is almost the creative force rather than the sum of created things. Yet whenever Aldhelm broaches the horizontal dimension he imagines Creation, not as acting, but as being acted upon.[42] In *De Creatura* those things which occupy the horizontal axis submit themselves passively to be shaped and directed, while the vertical axis is teeming with those beings revelling in base depths or more virtuously aspiring to heights. In *De Creatura* the physical world is an analogue of the spiritual one.[43]

Classical and Christian Influence

Despite the high regard in which Aldhelm is held by scholars, there is a surprising absence of interest in his individual riddles—in contrast to the burgeoning interest in the *Exeter Book* riddles. However, one aspect of the *Enigmata* that has attracted critics' notice is Aldhelm's use of the classical and the Christian tradition. Taking their cue from Aldhelm's vigorous denial of the power and divinity of classical gods, scholars have read the *Enigmata* in terms of a culture war. So, for instance, Steen

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[42] As we shall see in the following chapter, vernacular Creation riddles revel in the image of Creation's all encompassing, infinitely extending reach.

[43] Of course, this is a common enough analogue. However, Pope Gregory uses the image of ascending heights as a metaphor for the conversion of pagans in his 597 letter to Mellitus (see below), instructing him on his method of evangelizing. So, the image has a particular resonance in the history of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity.

suggests that the enigma as a genre "stems ultimately from biblical enigmata",[44] and further, that this allowed Aldhelm license to draw from classical, pagan sources without the risk that this might be misunderstood as an endorsement of them. Steen ignores the fact that Aldhelm names Symphosius (who is not mentioned by Steen) as a source for the *Enigmata* (Ald. *De Metris* 75.21—76.1) and that, amidst the tremendous popularity of riddling in Anglo-Saxon England, interest in riddles and riddle contests from the Bible is conspicuous by its absence.[45] A more serious omission, in which she is not alone,[46] is that Aldhelm's England is not beset by Roman religion nor for that matter by classical learning or literature, but rather by Germanic paganism. The Germanic gods, the real rivals to Christianity in England, are absent from the *Enigmata*—a significant clue in understanding Aldhelm's cultural project. All publicity is good publicity and Germanic religion(s) get none at all from Aldhelm's riddles. By contrast, although he is dismissive of classical figures, Aldhelm is usually rather carefully informative, providing clarifying and contextualising information about them.

Instead of regarding the *Engimata* as a battle ground for the classical versus Christian, it makes sense to take Aldhelm at his word that his joint objectives are to teach Christianity *and* classical literature. As Thornbury notes, Aldhelm proudly compares his own endeavours in bringing Latin poetry to England with Vergil's, in *Georgics*, of bringing agricultural-didactic poetry to the Latin-speaking world.[47] It is one thing for past Christians, like Jerome, writing in the context of the Christianized Roman Empire to disavow the pagan Roman past (as he does, for

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[44] J. Steen, 90.

[45] Aldhelm's mention of Biblical precedents only underlines the fact that he has not reworked Biblical riddles, nor has he adopted their form. By contrast, many Anglo-Latin riddle writers, including Aldhelm, reworked Symphosius' riddles and all adopted his riddle form. Lack of interest in Biblical riddles is so marked that the Old English Judges omits 14:6—15:7 thereby excluding the most famous riddle in the Old Testament, Samson's riddle.

[46] See the discussion of Herren's argument below.

[47] See *Aldhelmi Opera* R. Ehwald, ed. (Berlin, 1919), 202, and E. Thornbury "Aldhelm's Rejection of the Muses", 1—2.

example, in his letter to Eustochium in 388),[48] but for Aldhelm the struggle is to disseminate classical literature and learning. This is attested not only by his words but also by his actions in positioning his riddles between two treatises on metrics— and indeed by his use of quantitative metre. For although he claims no more than to teach metrics through the riddles, in Aldhelm's England metrics were a means to appreciating classical literature as well as to composing it. His use of classical allusions, figures and motifs, all carefully glossed and expounded, reveals him as an evangelist for classical literature as well as for Christianity. This has implications for the cosmology of *De Creatura* which I will treat after a brief consideration of Aldhelm's general use of the classics.

Aldhelm's *præfatio* with its energetic, overt rejection of classical influence establishes the Christian framework of the *Enigmata* (see above). But even here Aldhelm reveals his interest in classical literature. The *præfatio* is dense with classical allusions including, significantly, reference to the Muses.[49] Indeed, the *Enigmata* bears the distinction of being the first English text to allude to the Muses, though, as Thornbury notes, "with peculiarly characteristic irony, Aldhelm's poem is not only the first English text to introduce the Muses: it is also the first to reject them."[50] This manoeuvre is typical of Aldhelm. He is concerned to disavow the Muses lest it appear that he is writing under their influence, but in doing so he provides the reader with a very full account of the ideas and imagery associated with them in Latin literature. He neatly resolves any theological issues by making God his "muse" and the source of poetic inspiration. It is He who breathes "munera" ("gifts") of divine origin "stolidae...menti" ("into the dull mind") of the poet. The Christian God proves to be a stern, sober, sombre and vengeful muse—Aldhelm's fourth line, "Horrida nam multans torsisti membra Behemoth" (l. 4), ("for in punishment you tortured the horrible limbs of the Behemoth") leaves this

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[48] In which he claims not to have read a pagan author in more than fifteen years. See *Ad Eustochium* (Epistola XXII) in *Jerome: Letters and Select Works* in *Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers : a Select Library of the Christian Church. Second series,* VI, P. Schaff, trans. (Edinburgh, 1893), 53.

[49] A. Orchard "Poetic Inspiration and Prosaic Translation; the Making of *Cædmon's Hymn*" in *Studies in English Language and Literature — "Doubt Wisely": Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley*, J. Tosell and E. Tyler, eds. (New York,1996), 402—22, 406.

[50] E. Thornbury, 72.

unambiguous. God is a muse in the greatest contrast to the Roman Muses, or indeed to Symphosius' famously drunken Muse ("ebria Musa"). Moreover, Aldhelm unequivocally rejects any influence which might not proceed from God, or from the desire to understand His divine mysteries:

> Castalidas nimphas non clamo cantibus, istuc
> Examen neque spargebat mihi nectar in ore
> Cynthi sic numquam perlustro cacumina, sed nec
> In Parnasso procubui nec somnia vidi. (*prae.* 10—13)

> (I do not proclaim my verses to the Castalian nymphs,
> And no swarm has sprinkled nectar in my mouth;
> Equally, I do not wander over the peaks of Cynthus, nor
> Have I lain down on Parnassus, nor seen visions.)

This statement is understandably read as a rejection of the Roman poetic ethos—as it is—but, in a text which introduces the Muses to Anglo-Saxon England, such a rejection could more effectively have been achieved by passing over them in silence.[51]

Aldhelm's approach to the classics is individual, but it is also a product of his society. From the beginning, it was recognized that the conversion of England would be a slow process. In his letter of 597 Pope Gregory writes of Anglo-Saxon pagans:

> duris mentibus simul omnia abscidere impossibile esse non dubium
> est, quia et is, qui summum locum ascendere nititur, gradibus uel
> passibus, non autem saltibus elevatur. (Bede *Hist. Eccl.* 1. 30, Greg
> I. *Epistl.* 11. 76)

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[51] Persius, from whose work the *praefatio* draws, links bad poetry with a decline in morality, an idea which presumably had a certain resonance for Aldhelm.

(There is no doubt that it is impossible to cut away everything at
once from their stubborn minds; because he who struggles to climb
to the highest place, is raised by degrees or steps, not by leaps)

In this letter Pope Gregory specifically instructs Mellitus, who is on his way to join
Augustine's mission in England, to allow pagans to keep their temples and some of
their rites, but in the name of Christ, and so to effect a gradual conversion.[52]

I would like to consider for a moment, one other aspect of Gregory's letter
because it has implications for the kind of cultural negotiations undertaken in *De
Creatura* and the *Engimata* as a whole. Gregory stresses that while pagan temples
may be saved, the idols within them must be destroyed (*Epist.* 11. 76). Herren
argues for an equivalent literary strategy in Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* against Roman
paganism:

In a long passage in the metrical *De Virginitate* dealing with the martyr
Julian, Aldhelm records the destruction of the metal images of the
Roman gods, naming each of them and recording some of the myths
attached to them singly. He interrupts this long excursus with a
description of the destruction of the idol of Dagon (1 Kings [1 Sam.],
5:1—5), a deed accomplished by the 'vengeance of the Thunderer.'
And then: 'It was in no other wise that the Ruler of Olympus raged
against the pagan gods, whose shattered power fell to the ground, so
that no one was free of the terrible danger, as the consequence of this
writing reveals in its present manner.' The appropriation of terms such
as 'Thunderer' and 'Ruler of Olympus' to the Judaeo-Christian God...
is, therefore, more than a literary device... The true Jove has ousted the
false one, and is the rightful bearer of the name.

[52] Church argues that Pope Gregory probably knew very little about Anglo-Saxon religion(s) and that
his approach to paganism was modelled on Old Testament accounts of conversion and his own
Roman experience. See S. Church "Paganism in Conversion-Age Anglo-Saxon England: The
Evidence of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* Reconsidered" in *History*, 93 (2008), 162—180.162—180.

I agree with Herren that Aldhelm is waging a kind of sophisticated culture war in this passage, but its terms are not as straightforward as he suggests. The passage presents the Christian God—whose iconography is not overwhelmingly meteorological—as "the Thunderer".[53] Aldhelm serves Gregory's policy of assimilating pagan gods to the Christian God by his emphasis on the notion of the Christian God as a thunder god, worthy of relegating older, pagan thunder gods to an inferior place inside, not above, Creation. Herren also argues for the value of this, but in relation to Roman paganism. He writes "Moderns were not the first to realize that by controlling nomenclature and terminology one controls the battlefield of ideas"[54] and in particular, he reads Aldhelm's use of terms such as *tonans*, ("the Thunderer") for God and *Olympus* for Heaven as a way of pitting the "Christian Thunderer against the pagan one (Jupiter)".[55] However, like Steen, Herren does not consider that more significant in terms of Anglo-Saxon culture wars is the fact that Thor, a thunder god who inspired countless English place names (and a day name),[56] is omitted entirely. Aldhelm expounds his vision of the Christian God as the new, conquering Thunder. Moreover, in line with Gregory's policy, he describes the destruction of Roman idols and of Dagon with the heavy implication that this will be the fate of all pagan idols—all without a single reference to Germanic gods. Aldhelm's deafening silence denies all credibility to the Germanic gods who were

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[53] In Hannah's prayer, which precedes the two passages upon which Aldhelm draws in the metrical *De Virginitate* and which foreshadows them, she says "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; against them He will thunder [tonabit] in heaven" (1 Sam. 2:10). Interestingly, Hannah's prayer also contains an image of God as the Creator: "For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and on them He has set the world" (1 Sam. 2:8). This is the image of God with which Aldhelm opens his Creation riddle, so we may be sure that he was familiar with the prayer. The image only occurs four times in the Bible, always in books of the Old Testament: the time mentioned above in Samuel, twice in Job (Job 9:6; 26:11) and once in Psalms (Psalms 75:3).

[54] M. Herren "Aldhelm the Theologian" in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge* I, M. Lapidge, K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, A. Orchard, eds. (Toronto, 2005), 68—89, 75.

[55] Ibid., 75.

[56] H. Mayr-Harting *The Coming of Christianity*, 25—6. In conjunction with Thor's presence in later Old English texts, this is suggestive. However, it is worth noting that some scholars are increasingly skeptical about our evidence for the religion(s) of post-Roman, pre-Christian England, see S. Church, "Paganism in Conversion-Age Anglo-Saxon England: The Evidence of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* Reconsidered" in *History*, 93 (2008), 162—180.

the real target of Gregory's policy and the manifest representatives of paganism in Aldhelm's England.

The passage in *De Virginitate* is proof of Aldhelm's desire to spread knowledge of the classics. For here we see once again that in his rejection of classical pagan deities, Aldhelm is remarkably informative in naming them and listing their mythic achievements. He imagines the world populated by lesser gods who have been defeated and subjected by the Christian God. Aldhelm does not deny the exploits of classical gods and heroes, but rather asserts that they have been superseded by the new, victorious Christian God. Here Aldhelm seeks to demonstrate that, despite the obvious power required to perform their mythic feats, not one of the pagan gods is able to defend him or herself against the power of the Christian God. But in fact, Aldhelm is actually describing a pantheon of warring gods in which the most powerful, the Christian God, overthrows the others. In this construction, the Christian God is the successor to a series of pagan gods—indeed, Aldhelm relates the story of Jupiter's overthrow of Saturn.

However, the Christian God is distinguished from his pagan predecessors in that He exists outside Creation while they can only exist within it. This is mirrored in *De Creatura*. God stands above Creation, ruling it and, as Aldhelm makes clear (ll. 11—12), is able to defend His rule with force. On the other hand, Creation itself is full of the figures of pagan mythology; Cyclops, Vulcan, Zephyrus, and Phoebus all appear. As in the passage in *De Virginitate* (above), in *De Creatura* each exemplifies some excellence or prodigious capacity; the appetite of Cyclopes, the heat of Vulcan, the speed of Zephyrus and the radiance of Phoebus. With the exception of the Cyclopes' gluttonous consumption, their qualities are implicitly admired. They belong to the vertical axis, to the high side of the high/low dichotomy and they epitomize what is energetic and brilliant. Inevitably, however, they all are surpassed by Creation and, ultimately, by God Himself. Their presence explains Aldhelm's repeated assertion of God's separation from, and overlordship of, His Creation in a poem whose expression of ideology is otherwise implicit rather

than exegetical.[57] This model of a world populated by classical figures but dominated by God is an analogue of Aldhelm's hope for Anglo-Saxon culture: primarily and devoutly Christian but versed in and illuminated by classical learning.

Conclusion

The Riddle is a genre which is inescapably ideological. By its nature, it is an interrogative and therefore an interactive form. Like Symphosius before him, Aldhelm uses this aspect of the Riddle both to engage with the issues of his time and to affect a social agenda, ranging from improving classical learning to instilling greater modesty of dress.[58] This aspect of Symphosian riddling has not received much scholarly attention, despite the wide acceptance of the proposition that riddles are "units of world view".[59] In its project to force the reader to re-examine the world the Riddle also acts to reveal the biases that governed our old perception of it. Moreover, it determines what question will be asked of the world (and thus, the point of view from which the world will be considered) and it determines what answer is to be regarded as fulfilling that question. This is even truer of a riddle which sets itself to define the whole of Creation. In Aldhelm's case in particular, *De Creatura* is not accidentally ideological. To express and convince us of his view of God is one of the stated purposes of his riddle collection. It might seem, then, that in the persisting influence of his Creation Riddle, Aldhelm achieved his aim. Arguably, he did. Certainly, the wider English literary tradition has been dominated by Christian writers who love and admire classical literature. The relationship he struggles to forge between the Christian and the classical has dominated the English-speaking world. However, in terms of riddling, Aldhelm's influence has been less complete. Although all Creation Riddles in the Symphosian tradition are constructed around Aldhelm's conception and even share the rudiments of his structure, they are played out differently and so express different understandings of

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[57] For example, consider Aldhelm's treatment of the images of the vigil and of the locks; in each case he completes the image without sermonizing or propounding its meaning.

[58] In fact, some of Aldhelm's ideological points are so topical that his purpose is not always apparent except to an educated audience of his own period. Consequently, many passages proved so perplexing to later audiences that they were glossed, "fixed" or otherwise altered and misunderstood.

[59] A. Dundes "Folk Ideas as Units of Worldview" in *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore*, A. Paredes and R. Bauman, eds. (Austin, 1975), 93—103.

the world.[60] Aldhelm's Creation Riddle type has persisted, but over the centuries of its influence it has not proved a vehicle for Aldhelm's ideology. On the contrary, Aldhelm's brilliant Riddle form, Riddle device and Riddle *topos* has been put to the service of new, different world views.

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[60] T. Hill, 275—6.

Chapter Three

The *Exeter Book*:
Three Vernacular Versions of the Creation Riddle

Ealle ðas ðing synd mid anum naman genemnode gesceaft[1]

—— Ælfric, *De Fide,* 1.20,19.

The *Exeter Book* (Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501), given to the Cathedral in 1072 by Leofric, was probably compiled around the 960s or 970s, though establishing the dates of its constituent poems is rather more difficult. Amongst these are ninety-four[2] riddles—the largest collection of Old English riddles extant—arranged in two sequences. The manuscript is damaged in several places and given that the end of the codex has suffered fire damage, it may well have been intended as a century of riddles on the model of earlier Anglo-Latin collections. Yet, it is the ways in which the *Exeter Book* riddles differ from the Anglo-Latin collections, and from Symphosius, which is of the greatest interest to the concerns of this thesis. For example, the *Exeter Book* riddles probably had more than one author, while, individual riddles may have been composed by more than one poet.[3] Unlike the

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[1] (All these things are with one name named; "creation.")
[2] The number of riddles is still a matter of scholarly debate. In this thesis I follow the numbering of Bernard Muir. See B. Muir, ed. *Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry* (Chicago, 2006)
[3] See A. R. Riedinger "The Formulaic Style in the Old English Riddles" in *Studia Neophilologica,* 74 (2004), 30—43.

riddles of Symphosius, Aldhelm and the majority of Anglo-Latin poets, the *Exeter Book* riddles do not begin with a statement of authorial intent. The three most important and certain points of difference are these: the use of the vernacular, the absence of entitled solutions, and what Orchard terms the "apparently eclectic nature"[4] of the riddles—the riddles often repeat topics and lack any obvious thematic structure.[5] Symphosius and Aldhelm restrict themselves to one riddle per subject, but the *Exeter Book* riddles appear to be governed by riddlic conceits (devices) rather than by topics. For while some of the riddles apparently treat the same subjects, they rarely rely on the same paradox for their riddlic obscurity. These three points suggest an interaction with oral tradition, though naturally different riddles exhibit different levels of orality. Some are highly literary, while others were probably "orally composed at an early stage in their evolution".[6] However, almost all show signs of some level of interaction. The absence of solutions may well indicate that these riddles were known well enough for the answers to be deemed an unnecessary inclusion in the manuscript. What is clear is that the *Exeter Book* riddles do not continue in the direction in which Symphosian riddling had been heading under the cloistered influence of Tatwine and Eusebius towards increasingly abstract, theological or grammatical *topoi*. Instead they move in the direction of orality and the folk Riddle. This collection is the bridge between the highly literary riddles of Symphosius and Aldhelm, and the folk riddles of post-Conquest England.

In this chapter, I will consider three of the *Exeter Book* Riddles, the three riddles on Creation; *Riddle 40*, *Riddle 66* and *Riddle 93*.[7] These are an exception to the principle that the *Exeter Book* riddles do not repeat a riddlic device. Their shared paradox is that every quality and every extreme is true of some aspect of Creation and so all contradictions may be said to be true of Creation. Or, to borrow Ælfric's phrase, "ealle ðas ðing synd mid anum naman genemnode gesceaft" (Ælf. *De Fide.*

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[4] A. Orchard "Enigma Variations" in *Latin Learning and English Lore*, M. Lapidge, K. O'Brien-O'Keefe and A. Orchard, eds. (Toronto, 2005), 284—304, 286.
[5] Without entitled solutions it impossible to be sure of what structure, if any, the collection was intended to have, but the presence of multiple riddles on seemingly the same topic suggests that the intention was not programmatic.
[6] A. R. Riedinger, 2004, 32.
[7] For full texts see appendix C.

1.20, 19), ("all these things are with one name named; Creation"). They are all "versions" of Aldhelm's grand final riddle, *De Creatura*, but at different stages of transformation. *Riddle 40* is a "translation",[8] *Riddle 66* a reworking and *Riddle 93* is so significantly altered that without the intermediate *Riddle 66* the connection to *De Creatura* might never have been guessed. These three texts, spaced at thirds delineating the collection, chart the development of the Creation Riddle from *De Creatura* to the folk Creation Riddles of the Child Ballads. Although all depend on the same paradox, each represents a very different conception of Creation. *Riddle 40*, like its source text *De Creatura*, constantly emphasizes the relationship between God and His Creation. Creation itself is described through the enumeration of the diverse wonders of the created world and revealed in a series of vignettes, each describing God in the detail. *Riddle 66*, by contrast, is solely concerned with Creation which is conceptualised as an anthropomorphic, dynamic, speaking, vivifying consciousness, a unified force, living, moving and with agency, rather than simply existing. The riddle widens its view so that rather than seeing Creation in the infinite detail of the microcosm, we witness it in the grandeur of the macrocosm. *Riddle 66* distils the natural world into its large, structural elements and maps it accordingly. The final text, the highly fragmentary *Riddle 93*, appears to have further distilled Creation into a litany of comparatives.[9] Lacking the vignettes and word pictures of *Riddle 40* and *66*, the few surviving elements suggest that the emphasis has shifted from image to attribute. The riddle seems to be concerned with the qualities of Creation (its brightness, speed, etc.), rather than its constituent parts; celestial bodies, plants and animals.

In these three texts we witness some of the most dramatic shifts thus far in the Symphosian Riddle's journey back to folk riddling. In some cases the poet is more concerned to preserve the inherited notion than others, but in each he reveals, inadvertently or deliberately, some of his own conception of Creation. Whether or

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[8] For a discussion of Anglo-Saxon attitudes to translation, see below.
[9] For a recent discussion of the Comparative and Superlative Riddle type, see I. Konstantakos "Trial by Riddle: The Testing of the Counsellor and the Contest of Kings in the Legend of Amasis and Bias" in *Classica Et Mediaevalia* 55 (2005), 85—138, 126—8.

not these three texts were composed in sequence, they represent an idea in progress. We see this transformation take place, especially in the use of "basic images such as inside/outside, open/closed, high/low, and so forth, to which symbolic meaning is always attached".[10] This chapter explores and traces these changes as they can be seen through the three texts. In each case, I have tried to focus on what is new rather than what is inherited in the idea and on the perception towards which the poet is reaching.

Anglo-Saxon Attitudes to Translation

In order to clarify the relationship of the three texts to each other it will be useful to consider briefly those Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards translation which are significantly different to our own. Translation is always a task of methodological complexity. However, in the Anglo-Saxon period the complexity is compounded by strong traditions of orality which foster what seems to a modern sensibility to be a blurring of the distinction between author and translator. Indeed, as Thijs writes, the translator's role may include "adding comments and explanations" or even "creative literary rendering" and further, that these attitudes:

> ...gave rise to a whole *scala* of approaches ranging from literally close to freely paraphrasing, to the extent that the term "transformation" would be more suitable than "translation".[11]

Moreover, Anglo-Saxon translators faced very particular issues. For example, because Old English is a Germanic rather than a Romance language, translation of Latin texts became necessary in England around the middle of the seventh century,[12] long before it did in cultures where the vernacular was close enough for Latin texts to remain comprehensible. Thus, early English translators were without

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[10] F. Michelet *Creation, Migration and Conquest* (Oxford, 2006), 4.
[11] C. Thijs "Early Old English Translation: Practice Before Theory?" in *Neophilologus* 91 (2007), 149—173, 151.
[12] Ibid., 151.

contemporary precedents for their endeavours and their translations reflect a range of approaches. In the ninth century King Alfred's translators,[13] whose brief was part of a larger project to reverse the slump in learning and religion, took Saint Jerome's careful translation methodology as a model, but by the time of the *Exeter Book* a century later, the need for this kind of precision had diminished. Alfred's programme had been effective. Many key texts had been translated which, in combination with a resurgence in learning, allowed for the adoption of a more creative attitude, especially in relation to a text like *De Creatura* which is neither scriptural nor Biblical.[14]

Riddle 40, composed in the context of this post-Alfredian approach to translation, is an elaboration of *De Creatura*. Its original form appears to have been considerably longer than Aldhelm's poem. Indeed, as Klein notes of the only other translation of an Aldhelm riddle, "it makes the original paradox wholly its own".[15] And, in O'Brien O'Keeffe's formulation, "the Old English poet's technique sacrifices literal accuracy for poetic effect. So, for example, the poet omits to translate the image of the race in Aldhelm, line 39, developing instead the idea of speed".[16] This attitude is present throughout the text. The translator almost always retains Aldhelm's original images, although he changes their context and significance. This may seem whimsical, even reprehensible, to modern notions of translation but it is natural in a culture with strong oral traditions. Here translation becomes an opportunity for the same kinds of embellishments that are inherent in oral reproductions (performances) of texts. Indeed, by the lights of oral tradition, *Riddle 40* is surprisingly exacting. DiNapoli observes that:

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[13] R. Stanton *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2002), 101.

[14] Both Stanton and Thijs posit that the freer Roman attitude to translation of Greek texts may be understood in terms of the familiarity of the Roman audience with both the original language and the original texts which were being translated. It is tempting to speculate then, that the borrowing from and elaborating on previous riddle texts evident in the *Exeter Book* riddles may be in part due to the audience's familiarity with those texts—another indication that these texts circulated in popular and oral culture.

[15] T. Klein "The Old English Translation of Aldhelm's Riddle *Lorica*" in *The Review of English Studies*, New Series 48 (1997), 345—349, 345.

[16] K. O' Brien O'Keeffe "The Text of Aldhelm's Enigma no. c Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson C. 697 and Exeter *Riddle 40*" in Anglo-Saxon England 14, P. Clemoes, ed. (Cambridge, 1985), 61—74, 62.

amongst the various Old English poems that translate a source with which they can be compared, *Riddle 40* stands out in how closely it follows its original. The Anglo-Saxon authors of *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, *Elene*, and *The Phoenix*, to name the most prominent examples, consistently take enormous liberties with their sources, at points rendering them virtually new works. This cannot be said of *Riddle 40*, despite its omissions and occasional rearrangements.[17]

Thus, where shifts in emphasis or nuance do occur in *Riddle 40*, they are especially revealing and warrant our closest attention. Further, because of the nature of the riddle's subject ("Creation"), they also express important conceptual and philosophical differences.

The next Creation Riddle version, *Riddle 66* is, in turn, apparently a condensed reworking of *Riddle 40*. By DiNapoli's reckoning (see above), it is certainly an example of a translation that has become a "new work". Although *Riddle 66* is very much a transformation rather than a translation of *Riddle 40*, the two texts are clearly linked by phrases and other formulaic elements in common. The central image of *Riddle 66*, of Creation embracing the fields, is an adaptation of *Riddle 40* lines 50—3 which begin with a repeated formulaic couplet (ll. 50—1 and ll. 82—3), the only repeated element in that poem:

> Ic eorþan eom æghwær brædre,
> ond widgielra þonne þes wong grena;
> folm mec mæg bifon ond fingras þry
> utan eaþe ealle ymbclyppan (ll. 50—3),

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[17] DiNapoli "In the Kingdom of the Blind, the One-Eyed Man is A Seller of Garlic: Depth-Perception and the Poet's Perspective in the Exeter Book Riddles" in *English Studies* 81 (2000), 422—455, 439.

(I am broader everywhere than the earth and wider than this green field;
a hand may move me and all of me be enclosed easily between three
fingers.)

Compare:

Ic eom mare   þonne þes middangeard

læsse þonne hondwyrm…

                    …Sæs me sind ealle

flodas on fæðmum   ond þes foldan bearm,

grene wongas.   (ll.1—5)

(I am greater than this middle-earth, less than a hand-worm [...]. All
the seas' tides are in my embraces and the earthen breast, the green
fields.)

Moreover, the image of smallness in *Riddle 66* is a quote from *Riddle 40*, lines 95—6,[18] and employs the unusual word *hondwyrm*. The word only appears four times in the Old English corpus;[19] once apiece in *Riddles 40* and *66*, once in a medical text (as one would expect) and once in the *Corpus Glossary* where it is a translation for *Ladascapiae briensis*.[20] The word is used in *Riddle 40* as a translation of Aldhelm's *verme* (l. 66)—more usually translated by its Old English descendant, *wyrm*. This kind of internal evidence suggests that *Riddle 66* is a reworking of *Riddle 40*, rather than of *De Creatura* in either an oral or written form.

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[18] "…læsse þonne se hondwyrm", ("less than a hondwyrm").

[19] *Old English Corpus*, A. di Paolo Healey, ed. 2005. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu.elib.tcd.ie/o/oec>

[20] Bradley notes "As hondwyrm ('hand-worm') means the itch insect, it seems natural to guess that–*scapiae* is some sort of corruption of *scabies*. Perhaps *lata scabie* may have occurred in some prose passage alluding to Vergil *Geo*. 3. 299 ("glacies ne frigida laedat molle pecus, *scabiem*que *ferat*") and have been mistaken for a plural noun. Confusion of name between the disease of sheep and that of human beings would, I suppose, be natural enough." H. Bradley "Remarks on the Corpus Glossary" in *Classical Quarterly* 13 (1919), 89—108, 91. This theory that the mistake may derive from a prose version of the *Georgics* is rather interesting given the other parallels between the *Georgics* on the one hand and *Riddle 40*, and its original, *De Creatura*, on the other.

No such obvious linguistic connection marks what remains of *Riddle 93* as belonging to this series of increasingly "transformed translations". Rather it was identified as such on the basis of its structure by the great riddle scholar, Frederick Tupper, who noticed its similarity to *De Creatura*, *Riddle 40* and *Riddle 66*. He writes, "the few surviving phrases of this badly damaged fragment exhibit a striking likeness to the comparatives of the 'Creation' riddles".[21] It is also true that *Riddle 93* shares a common vocabulary of images, a similar implied conception of Creation and, of course, a central paradox. However, in its fragmentary state it is impossible to tell where it sits in the transformation spectrum.

Riddle 40

Riddle 40, the first of the *Exeter Book* Creation Riddles, "was probably not translated into Old English before the tenth century",[22] nearly three hundred years after the composition of *De Creatura*. With the exception of a couple of repeated or formulaic phrases, *Riddle 40* shows very few signs of orality. The poem, which differs from Aldhelm's original in its tone more than its structure, describes Creation in an eclectic series of detailed and luscious vignettes apparently exemplifying various abstract qualities, presided over by ever-present God. The end of the text is missing, leaving us without its rendering of some of the most interesting and cryptic elements of Aldhelm's imagery. It would have been fascinating, for example, to see what the vernacular poet made of Aldhelm's comments about colour—a subject hardly touched upon by Symphosius and therefore Aldhelm's own particular addition—in the light of Casson's observations about the Old English relationship with colour.[23] The end of the vernacular translation might also have been able to

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[21] F. Tupper *The Riddles of the* Exeter Book (Darmstadt, 1968), 238.
[22] J. Steen *Verse and Virtuosity: the Adaptation of Latin rhetoric in Old English Poetry* (Toronto, 2008), 91.
[23] See R. Casson, "Colour Shift: Evolution of English Colour Terms From Brightness to Hue" in *Colour Categories in Thought and Language* C. L. Hardin and L. Maffi, eds. (Cambridge, 1997), 224—39.

shed some light on one of Aldhelm's most perplexing images, the "senae plagae", ("six zones").[24]

The difference in tone between *Riddle 40* and its model, *De Creatura*, becomes obvious almost immediately. The undercurrent of tension between Creator and created, always present in Aldhelm's riddle, is replaced by a view of God mentoring his Creation. *De Creatura* describes God as "frenans" (l. 2), ("restraining") the natural world "lege" (l. 2), ("with [His] law"), where *Riddle 40* imagines that He "healdeð ond wealdeð" (l. 5), ("holds and guides") the world. *Riddle 40*'s depiction of a gentler, more nurturing relationship between God and Creation is accompanied by a greater sense of wonder. We have already seen that Aldhelm's precise mind goes straight to the heart of the riddle's paradox in his first words about Creation, that God "me varium fecit" (l. 4), ("made me manifold"). By contrast, the vernacular translation stresses the awe-inspiring: "He mec wrætlice worhte æt frymþe" (l. 6), ("He made me miraculously at the beginning").

This difference in emphasis between *De Creatura* and *Riddle 40* is present throughout the text and proves to be the most significant difference between the two. *De Creatura* stresses the pivotal oppositions contained within Creation in clean elegant Latin and saves elaboration for those passages which either describe the glory of God, or appeal to it. By contrast, the poet of *Riddle 40* sees every image as an opportunity to give full reign to his powers of description. The basic structure of

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[24] Aldhelm's phrase must be some kind of reference to the five Vergilian "zonae" (the two polar regions, the equator and the two remaining areas on either side of the equator) in the *Georgics* (1. 233). Ovid also mentions five zones at the beginning of *Metamorphoses* (1.32—51). This having been said, it is rather surprising that Aldhelm matches Vergil in neither number nor word; if he means to refer to Vergil, why use "plagae", especially when the more obvious connection of number is gone? Interestingly, in his riddle dialogue, Alcuin, who is greatly indebted to Aldhelm's *Enigmata*, refers to the six "paries" (scribal error for "pars" perhaps?) which are revealed to be left, right, above, below, in front, behind. Does this perhaps suggest that these six "directions" reflect Alcuin's understanding of this passage in Aldhelm? I am indebted to Dr. Conrad-O'Briain for the suggestion that Aldhelm's "plagae" do indeed refer to the Vergilian "zonae" but that Aldhelm has added the Earthly Paradise as a sixth zone—six being the number of earthly perfection. Yet even this explanation is problematic; if the alteration in number is Aldhelm's own coinage, why does he not explain it as he so often does when he feels that a point is obscure? Conversely, if it was an idea in common use in Aldhelm's period, why have no other references to "six zones" survived? All in all, a vernacular translation such as that presumably lost in the MS corruption of *Riddle 40* might have been extremely illuminating.

De Creatura becomes a frame for his own lively and abundant observations and experience of the world—it is no wonder that the *Exeter Book* riddles are so often considered in terms of what they reveal about the material culture of the Anglo-Saxons and the conditions of their everyday lives.[25] Thus *Riddle 40* is always expanding on *De Creatura*. Where Aldhelm in a single phrase and with remarkable economy writes "grossas et graciles rerum comprenso figuras" (l. 20), ("I embrace the coarse and the fine forms of things"), the vernacular poet writes:

> swa me leof fæder   lærde æt frymþe,
>
> þæt ic þa mid ryhte   reccan moste
>
> þicce ond þynne;   þinga gehwylces
>
> onlicnesse   æghwær healde. (ll. 34—7)

("...so the dear Father enjoined me at the beginning that since then I might justly guide the thick and thin: of each thing everywhere I hold the likeness.")

While *Riddle 40*'s "þicce ond þynne",[26] conveys the variations in size of Aldhelm's "grossas et graciles", it fails to suggest the further opposition being drawn between the gross and coarse on the one hand and the delicate and fine on the other. But perhaps more importantly, the vernacular poet suggests a more nurturing relationship between Creation and its constitution parts. Here the prosopopoetic voice tells us that God charged it to "mid ryhte reccan" both the thick and the thin. The stark dichotomy of Aldhelm's original is further blurred when the vernacular poet adds that "þinga gehwylces/ onlicnesse æghwær healde", ("of each thing everywhere I hold the likeness"). Creation is no longer conceived of as encompassing two opposites, but rather as containing everything everywhere.

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[25] For examples of studies which read the *Exeter Book* riddles for their information about Anglo-Saxon life and material culture, see D. Pelteret "The Image of the Slave in Some Anglo-Saxon and Norse Sources" in *Slavery and Abolition* 23 (2002), 187—190, A. N. Doane "Three Old English Implement Riddles: Reconsiderations of Numbers 4, 49 and 73" in *Modern Philology* 84 (1987), 243—257.

[26] In fact, O'Brien O'Keeffe criticizes this translation noting that it "misplaces the referent of Aldhelm, line 20, *grossas et graciles... figuras*." K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 63.

Riddle 40's greater emphasis on narrative and its digressive sensuous evocation largely erases Aldhelm's polarising vision. It encourages a less exclusionary and divisive view of the world. Each extreme is separated from the next by an extended descriptive passage. Since descriptive passages often include details unrelated to the ostensible demonstration, the contrast is inevitably blunted. Consequently the effect is not of a world divided into good and evil along a number of axes, but rather of a unified Creation, some parts of which are found to be more delightful than others. In this respect *Riddle 40* is a return to the more theriocentric atmosphere of Symphosius' riddles. The shift is not seismic but certainly noticeable. For example, when Aldhelm uses the sows as illustrative of abundance, the animals are not seen in their own terms but rather in terms of their value to humans. In fact, Aldhelm betrays a slight distaste towards the animals and especially towards what he perceives as their gluttony. However unpleasant Aldhelm finds the spectacle, their ever-fattening flesh is essential to the human food supply and the cause of joy amongst the swineherds:

> Pinguior, en, multo scrofarum axungia glisco,
> Glandiferis iterum referunt dum corpora fagis
> Atque saginata laetantur carne subulci (ll. 48—50)

> (See! I swell up fatter by far than the grease of the sows as they
> stuff their bodies again with mast-bearing beech and the
> swineherds are delighted by the fattened flesh)

The equivalent passage in *Riddle 40* marks the end of the legible manuscript, but as far as we can tell, the poet has kept most of the elements of Aldhelm's original. However, crucially, Aldhelm's swineherds are gone and the joy he attributes to them has been transferred to the pig who "wynnum lifde", ("lived happily") in the beechwood. Moreover, the pig is no longer a member of a herd, but rather a single, we might say, Platonic pig, which stands for the porcine condition. Aldhelm, with

greater poetic discipline, uses the image of the sows solely to illustrate his point; the abundance of their food produces an abundance of flesh which in turn promises an abundance of meat for human consumption; since they are sows, their health also reflects their ability to produce piglets, thus increasing the herd and therefore the human food supply. By contrast, the vernacular poet is clearly more interested in the opportunity to describe the creatures themselves:

> Mara ic eom ond fættra   þonne amæsted swin,
> bearg bellende,   [þe] on bocwuda,
> won wrotende   wynnum lifde
> þæt he... (ll. 105—8)

> (Greater I am and fatter than the mast-fed swine, the grunting
> hog, dark rooting, that lived joyfully in the beechwood so that
> he...)

The poet takes obvious delight in this behaviour. By using the word *bearg* which implies a male not a female animal, the vernacular poet instantly dispenses with the idea of the pigs as a symbol of abundance and fertility. The other word used to refer to the pig, *swin*, may include wild animals, which in itself implies an autonomy.

Curiously, the vernacular poet has also removed Aldhelm's other reference to human food. Where Aldhelm has Creation proclaim itself "tostis...mollior extis" (l. 43), ("I am softer than cooked offal"), the vernacular poet replaces it with "hnescre ic eom micle halsrefeþre,/ seo her on winde wæweð on lyfte" (l. 80—1), ("I am much softer than the down, which here on the wind floats on high"). O'Brien O'Keeffe has cited some infelicities in the Rawlinson manuscript from which the translator was working which may account for this in part, but concludes that in view of marginal glossing which clarifies the obscured words, such problems are not enough to explain it fully. She writes, whether "he wished to avoid 'snædelðearm' or 'bæcðearm', the Old English words for *exta*—neither apparently ever used in

poetry—or whether baked or twisted entrails did not make sense to him, it is impossible to know."[27]

The excising of the swineherd and the transformation of the livestock into a single, possibly wild, pig in combination with the removal of this image of cooked human food is intriguing. The swineherd and his herd are images of farming; images of the transformation of nature through human habitation and civilization. They are markers of culture and humanity, the "cooked" to use Levi-Strauss' term.[28] The vernacular poet's avoidance of images of civilization is especially apparent in his treatment of Aldhelm's image of the curled locks in which civilization is contrasted with its absence:

> Cincinnos capitis nam gesto cacumine nullos,
>
> Ornent qui frontem pompis et tempora setis,
>
> Cum mihi caesaries volitent de vertice crispae,
>
> Plus calamistratis se comunt quae calamistro. (ll, 44—7)

> (I bear no ringlets from the top of my head which would adorn
>
> my forehead with a fringe and my temples with hair even
>
> though luxuriant hair flows from my elegant crown,   more
>
> curled than that produced by curling irons.)

As we have seen, for Aldhelm curled locks are a sign of unchristian vanity, but the image is also concerned with civilization and its technology. In *Riddle 40* the curled locks are no longer an image of civilization:

> Ne hafu ic in heafde   hwite loccas
>
> wræste gewundne,   ac ic eom wide calu;
>
> ne ic breaga ne bruna   brucan moste,

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[27] K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, 70.

[28] See C. Levi-Strauss *The Raw and the Cooked*, J. and D. Weightman, trans. (New York, 1969)

ac mec bescyrede   scyppend eallum;

nu me wrætlice   weaxað on heafde

þæt me on gescyldrum   scinan motan

ful wrætlice   wundne loccas. (ll. 98—104)

(I have no white locks on my head excellently curled, for I am completely bald; nor am I allowed to possess eyebrows or eyelashes, for the Shaper sheared me of them all; now curled locks grow marvellously from my head that shine on my shoulders most marvellous.)

Rather it expresses the dichotomy of bald/hirsute, though the underlying idea seems to be concerned with age/youth.[29] All in all it is rather unsettling. Where other creatures have been imagined as whole, this image focuses on disembodied body parts, the hair, the eye lashes and the eyebrows which are further "disembodied", literally rather than figuratively this time, by God.

These strange, oblique, and slightly disturbing images stand in dramatic juxtaposition to the poem's treatment of the animal world. For the missing offal (see above), for example, the vernacular poet substitutes the feather present in Aldhelm several lines earlier as the first of two exemplars of lightness. Consequently, the vernacular treatment of that earlier passage includes only Aldhelm's pond-skater which can now be described in greater detail. Characteristically, and in the strongest possible distinction from the human images, the elaboration of the pond-skater image includes a greater sense of its miraculous nature; it is a creature which "on flode gæð" (l. 77) ("walks on the water"). Though the growth of the *loccas* is described as "wrætlice", it is not the man but God who has such power, where the pond-skater has abilities which are marvellous by their own nature. The vernacular

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[29] This is interesting because the poem's overt image of age and youth is also illustrated with a human image: "Ic eom micle yldra þonne ymbhwyrft þes/ oþþe þes middangeard meahte geweorþan,/ ond ic giestron wæs geong acenned /mære to monnum þurh minre modor hrif" (ll. 42—5) ("I am much older than this earthly circle, or than this earth might become and yesterday I was new born, splendid to men, from my mother's womb.")

poet even tells us that the pond-skater makes his crossing "fotum dryge" (l. 77) ("with dry feet"); an observation which stresses a new wet/dry opposition, while emphasizing his remarkable talent, and also, apparently, showing an interest in his comfort. These marked editorial changes consistently remove or transform images of the human world, replacing them with natural ones. The treatment of the sole surviving vestige of humanity, the locks of hair, betrays a conflicted, ambiguous attitude.

A further consequence of the vernacular poet's mixing and matching is that an image of lightness ends up masquerading as an image of softness (in place of the expunged offal). The feather is described as *hnesce*, ("soft") but imagined as light:

> hnescre ic eom micle   halsrefeþre,
> seo her on winde   wæweð on lyfte.(ll. 80—1)

(I am much softer than the down, which here on the wind floats on high.)

Aldhelm's use—"Sum levior pluma, cedit cui tippula limphae" (l. 41), ("I am lighter than a feather, to which even a pond-skater concedes")—continues to affect the vernacular poet's imagination, but all possibility of dichotomy is defeated at a stroke, for in order to keep the opposition at its strongest, the image must be focused and succinct. Yet the vernacular poet allows himself to become distracted by the feather floating in the wind.

The addition of an elemental aspect—the air on which the feather floats—is especially significant in the context of the previous two images, both of which the poet elaborates in relation to a primary element: the flint which strikes fire and before that the insect that walks on water. Thus, when the poet moves from the pond-skater on the water, to the flint striking fire, to the feather floating on the air, to the broad Earth and the wide fields, he has completed a quaternity of elements in the

context of the breadth of Creation. Here, right in the middle of the poem[30] he dispenses with Aldhelm's template, establishes a cyclic structure of elements and gives pride of place to an oral formula:

> Ic eorþan eom   æghwær brædre
> ond widgelra   þonne þes wong grena. (ll. 82—3)

(I am everywhere broader than the earth and wider than this green field)

As noted above, this is the only formulaic repetition in the poem (ll.50—1, 82—3) and one of the few signs of orality in what is one of the more "literary" of the *Exeter Book* riddles. It is also the basis of the opening line of *Riddle 66*. The broad green field is followed by an equivalent water image (borrowed from a concluding section of *De Creatura*) which matches the grandeur of the description of the fields: "Mara ic eom ond strengra þonne se micla hwæl,/ se þe garsecges grund bihealdeð" (ll. 92—3) ("I am greater and stronger than this huge whale that watches the ocean's floor"). The whale's size and massive power opens a contrast with the last water image, the minute pond-skater. Thus, the elemental images are framed in the context of the great/small dichotomy.

This series of expansive, elemental images shifts *Riddle 40* away from Aldhelm's opposition of high/low and broad/small in the direction of great/small. This is *Riddle* 40's most important divergence from the vertical axis of Aldhelm's world view, noted in the previous chapter. It represents both an ideological shift and a corresponding shift in what Michelet terms "imaginary geography" since, as she notes, there are "meanings inherent in the opposition between high and low".[31] These meanings are linked to the symbolism of the Christian cross which "as the saving bridge between divinity and humanity plays a key role...by dividing and

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[30] This can be surmised because although the vernacular poet alters and expands on *De Creatura* in *Riddle 40*, he is reasonably faithful in preserving the proportions.
[31] F. Michelet, 5.

shaping reality into four parts or four directions."[32] Crucially, these four directions are not equal. The Christian cross (unlike various pagan equilateral crosses) lengthens and stresses the vertical axis as the connection between the Divine and human. Aldhelm's privileging of the vertical over the horizontal axis must be read in these terms. Let us take as an example of this ideological shift Aldhelm's line:

> ego complector sub caeli cardine cuncta" (l. 8)
>
> (I embrace all things beneath the pole of heaven)

And *Riddle 40*'s translation:

> ic mid waldendes   worde ealne
>
> þisne ymbhwyrft   utan ymbclyppe (ll. 14—5)

> (I, with the Master's word, all this worldcircle utterly embrace around.)

In Aldhelm's image Creation stretches out but, ultimately, is limited by its relationship to the vertical axis. Creation is defined as what exists below, beneath the pole of Heaven. Aldhelm privileges the high as the realm of God, over the low, the mortal realm of His Creation.[33] By contrast the vernacular translator dispenses with the vertical axis and amplifies the idea of embrace. The circularity and breadth of this embrace is enacted in the two *ymb-* prefixes: "ymbhwyrft utan ymbclyppe", ("worldcircle utterly embrace around"). While the Old English *clyppan* and the Latin *completere* both have the same essential meaning, "to embrace", the Old English verb also includes the sense of "to honour, prize or cherish",[34] an additional

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[32] K. Jolly "Tapping the Power of the Cross: Who and for Whom?" in *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England,*C. Karkov, S. Keefer and K. Jolly, eds. (Woodbridge, 2006), 58—79, 63. Jolly points out that the sign of the cross was often present on boundary markers and so was used to mark geographical as well as symbolic space.

[33] Michelet notes an interesting parallel of this, namely that a "high/low dichotomy contrasts human and monstrous dwellings: while the latter are confined to the lower regions, the former tower over many lands (Heorot)". F. Michelet, 80.

[34] See J. R. Clark Hall *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Cambridge, 1960)

meaning which contributes to the poem's overall sense of a gentle and affectionate mutuality between Creator and created.

Riddle 40 is not without the vertical axis—in the middle of the poem the riddle-subject declares "Hyrre ic eom heofone", ("I am higher than Heaven")—but high/low is manifestly not the poem's ruling dichotomy as it is in *De Creatura*. Ultimately, Aldhelm's conception won out. The question, implicit or explicit, and however phrased, "what is higher than…?" has dominated post-Conquest Creation Riddles. Although comparatives concerning breadth do occur, they are not all-pervasive. The vertical axis has supplied the normative first question in the sequence typical of later Creation Riddles.[35]

Riddle 66

Riddle 66 seems to be a condensed reworking of *Riddle 40*. Indeed, critics often fail to distinguish it from its antecedent. Michelet dismisses it as a shorter version of *Riddle 40*, and in accordance with her larger thesis,[36] describes *Riddle 66* as "a short poem revolving around the notion that the world is an enclosed area".[37] By contrast, I shall argue that it reveals a new conception of Creation and that far from expressing enclosure, it is dynamic and expansive in its images and most of all in its sense of space. This is enacted in the schema of *Riddle 66* which is stronger and more structured, giving the piece a greater poetic unity. Where *Riddle 40* is divided between Creator and Creation, *Riddle 66* focuses only on Creation. Thus the riddle's structure no longer has to accommodate a description of what the riddle's answer is not, as well as what it is. *Riddle 66* replaced *Riddle 40*'s charming but piecemeal ramble through the detailed particularities of Creation always in the

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[35] See chapter four. As we shall see, these oppositions act as questions, though they are not phrased as direct interrogatives, because the object in this riddle is to guess what is bolder than a wild boar, what more fragrant than frankincense, etc.

[36] She writes that the "original space of creation is enclosed, properly filled, and settled. But this arrangement is constantly challenged and is never allowed to endure. The sense of space that can be reconstructed from the Creation scene as narrated in Old English verse suggests an insecurity about boundaries, a constant fear of the outside (considered as a threat), and an anxiety to secure everything in its proper place." F. Michelet, 63.

[37] Ibid., 60.

context of its guardian Creator with bold, cosmographical imagery and a structure which moves from the general to the particular and back again:

> Ic eom mare   þonne þes middangeard
>
> læsse þonne hondwyrm,   leohtre þonne mona,
>
> swiftre þonne sunne.   Sæs me sind ealle
>
> flodas on fæðmum   ond þes foldan bearm,
>
> grene wongas.   Grundum ic hrine,
>
> helle underhnige,   heofonas oferstige,
>
> wuldres eþel,   wide ræce
>
> ofer engla eard,   eorþan gefylle,
>
> ealne middangeard   ond merestreamas
>
> side mid me sylfum.   Saga hwæt ic hatte.

> (I am greater than this middle-earth, less than a hand-worm, lighter than the moon, swifter than the sun. All the seas' tides are in my embraces and the earthen breast, the green fields. I touch the foundations, I sink under hell, I soar over the heavens, the glorious realm; I reach wide over the homeland of angels; I fill the earth abundantly, the entire world and the streams of the oceans with myself. Say what I am called.)

The opening phrase, "Ic eom mara þonne þes middangeard/ læsse þonne hondwyrm" (ll.1—2), ("I am greater than this middle-earth, less than a hand-worm"), dispenses at a stroke with the vertical and horizontal axes of past versions and imagines space stretching out and then shrinking in every direction simultaneously. This is an infinitely expansive image, for although Creation tells us that it is greater than middle-earth it gives no indication that there is any limit to how much greater. Indeed, neither *middangeard* nor the *hondwyrm* are able to be seen in their entirety, the former because it is too large, the latter because it is too small.

Rather their existence is deduced. Far from being bounded within a human sphere this imagery exceeds it in every direction. In *Riddle 66* two fixed points no longer compare themselves as they do in *Riddle 40*'s "Hyrre ic eom heofone" (l. 38), ("I am higher than Heaven") joined by the present form of the verb to be, stressing the static state of things. Instead, Creation is the swooping, soaring force which proclaims "helle underhnige, heofonas oferstige" (l. 6), ("I sink under hell, I soar over the heavens"). The high/low dichotomy remains, but by implication only. The emphasis of the piece is now on creative movement. The nascent conception of Creation in *De Creatura* and *Riddle 40* as embracing and circling is realized here, fulfilling and exceeding middle-earth. It describes itself in a series of verbs; *hrindan* ("to thrust"), *underhnigan* ("to sink under"), *oferstigan* ("to climb over"), *ræcan* ("to reach"), *fyllan* ("to fill, to replenish"). It is a conception of Creation which Irving links to the dying and rising God, the Harrowing of Hell and the Ascension, and the paradox of the Divine perspective in which the world is constantly and simultaneous about to be made, in the making, and made. Irving describes it as the "action operating in time and out of time, always in process, always already completed, always hoped for".[38]

In *Riddle 40*, God is conceived as the moving force who "healdeð ond wealdeð" (l. 5), ("holds and guides") all the heavens and the earth. Although Creation too embraces the earth in *Riddle 40*, it is only by God's command:

> Þisne middangeard   meahtig dryhten
> mid his onwalde   æghwær styreð;
> swa ic mid waldendes   worde ealne
> þis ymbhwyrft   utan ymbclyppe. (ll. 12—5)

> (This middle-earth, the mighty Lord with his authority everywhere
> steers; so I, by means of the Master's word, all this circle of earth
> embrace.)

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[38] E. Irving "The Advent of Poetry: Christ I" in *Anglo-Saxon England* 25 (Cambridge, 1996)

Even when Creation is declaring its puissance, "Eal ic under heofones hwearftre recce" (l. 33), ("I rule all under the circle of heaven") it is only because, "swa me loef fæder lærde æt frymþe" (l. 34), ("so the dear Father enjoined me at the beginning"). However, in *Riddle 66*, Creation itself is imagined as the moving force. Where the Creation of *Riddle 40* claims that it is "widgielra þonne þes wong grena" (l. 51), ("wider than this green field") the Creation of *Riddle 66* claims "Sæs me sind ealle/ flodas on fæðmum ond þes foldan bearm,/ grene wongas" (ll. 3—5), ("All the seas' tides are in my embraces and the earthen breast, the green fields"). The two passages form an interesting comparison because they stand in an intertextual relationship to each other and so the shift in conception is especially clear. *Riddle 66*'s Creation stretches as far as the fields and seas, and crucially, beyond. The notion of filling and encompassing the created world is so important that it returns as the final image: "eorþan gefylle,/ ealne middangeard ond merestreamas/ side mid me sylfum" (ll.8—10), ("I fill the earth abundantly, the entire world and the streams of the oceans with myself.") Even "pole of heaven", the limiting feature of *De Creatura* does not bound *Riddle 66*'s Creation, which declares "wuldres eþel, wide ræce/ ofer engla eard" (ll. 7—8), ("the glorious realm, I reach wide over the homeland of angels").

The absence of the Creator/Creation dichotomy in *Riddle 66* is reflected in a shift away from, though not a complete abandonment of, oppositions. The first three lines, which are ostensibly made up of two oppositions, illustrate the point:

> Ic eom mare   þonne þes middangeard
> læsse þonne hondwyrm,   leohtre þonne mona,
> swiftre þonne sunne. (ll. 1—3)

> (I am greater than this middle-earth, less than a hand-worm, lighter
> than the moon, swifter than the sun.)

The first "opposition" is in the adjectives *mare* and *læsse*, though not in the images which illustrate them.[39] The reverse it true of the second; the adjectives *leohtre* and *swiftre* are not in opposition, though the images *mona* and *sunne* are an ancient, archetypal and almost universal dichotomy. Yet the very fact that the poet uses this ancient dichotomy to illustrate qualities (lightness and swiftness) which are not dichotomous, or even opposed, demonstrates that his thoughts are tending away from the dualism of *De Creatura* and *Riddle 40*.

This development is intriguing since the oppositional structure is deeply embedded in the Christian tradition—we might recall Augustine's comment on oppositions in language and the world in *Civitate Dei*[40]—and more importantly, oppositions are at the heart of the Biblical account of Creation. Genesis describes God first separating out the oppositions—the heaven from the earth, the light from the dark, the land from the sea—that are seminal to the conception of Creation in *Riddle 40* and its model, *De Creatura*. Yet in some significant ways, *Riddle 66* actually becomes more not less like the Creation of Genesis. The imagery of *Riddle 66* is closer to the cosmographical imagery of Genesis than is Aldhelm's miscellany of sea-weed and honey, Cyclopes and Vulcan's forge, curly locks and Chinese spun silk, golden bosses and cooked offal. *Riddle 40*'s shift towards elemental imagery is realized in *Riddle 66* which is dominated by cosmological imagery; the *mona*, ("moon"), *sunne*, ("sun"), *sæs* ("seas"), *flodas* ("floods"), *wongas* ("fields"), *grundum* ("the ground"), *helle* ("Hell"), *heofonas* ("the heavens"), *eorþan* ("the earth") and *merestreamas* ("streams of the oceans"). Moreover, the structure, which as has already been observed moves from the general to the particular, is like the structure of the Creation in Genesis.

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[39] For although "middangeard" and a "hondwyrm" contrast each other, a creature like the hand-worm cannot be the opposite of the world; they are chalk and cheese.

[40] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei,* 11, 18. "sicut ergo ista contraria contrariis opposita sermonis pulchritudinem reddunt; ita quadam non verborum, sed rerum eloquentia contrariorum oppositione saeculi pulchritude componitur." ("...just as that opposition of contraries bestows beauty upon language, so the beauty of this world is built upon the opposition of contraries through a certain elegance not of words but of matter.")

Neither *Riddle* 66's strength of conception nor the simple elegance of its structure is matched in later Creation Riddles. Yet it was tremendously influential. A small token of this is the survival of almost all the comparatives of *Riddle 66* in the later oral version of the Creation Riddle in which each becomes a riddle in its own right, as we shall see. More fundamentally, the innovations in this text were copied and extended in later texts. Thus, later texts embrace the more cosmographical imagery of *Riddle 66*. Its shorter and more memorable structure and imagery encouraged the further abbreviation of the Creation Riddle and helped the various elements to solidify into a series of even smaller and more memorable chunks—what Dundes calls "units of worldview"[41]—which are the currency of oral literature. These formulaic fragments could then be reused and reordered to form the basis of future Creation Riddles. Much of this transformation is present in *Riddle 93*, but its origins are clearly visible in *Riddle 66*.

Riddle 93

Finally we come to *Riddle 93*. After the grandeur of *Riddle 66*, this woefully incomplete riddle seems rather modest, but in fact, more than any other Anglo-Saxon Creation Riddle version, it is a sign of things to come. It is here that the Creation Riddle completes the transformation which makes it accessible to the oral tradition. Despite this, *Riddle 93* is so fragmentary that it is rarely discussed, indeed, rarely mentioned even in passing[42] and has often been excluded from translations on the grounds that so little survives that a translation would be meaningless.[43] Despite

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[41] A. Dundes "Folk Ideas as Units of Woldview" in *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore* A. Paredes and R. Bauman, eds. (Austin, 1975), 93—103.

[42] In addition to the absence of articles devoted to it, Riddle 93 does not even rate a mention in larger works which engage with Old English cosmologies and Creation narratives. Both Michelet and Wehlau, for example, consider Riddles 40 and 66 at some length without even mentioning Riddle 93, although Tupper's observation of the connection between the three riddles is long standing and there is now a consensus, despite Williamson's suggestion of "water", that the riddle is solved as "Creation". F. Tupper, 238, and C. Williamson *A Feast of Creatures: Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Songs* (Philadelphia, 1983). See also: F. Michelet *Creation, Migration and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature*. (Oxford, 2006), and R. Wehlau *The Riddle of Creation: Metaphor Structures in Old English Poetry* (New York, 1997)

[43] Crossley-Holland's excellent translation of the Exeter Book Riddles is such an example, see K. Crossley-Holland, trans. *The Exeter Book Riddles* (Harmondsworth, 1979)

the Postmodernist literary project to rescue and re-evaluate texts excluded because of their fragmentary nature from a canon which values the whole, *Riddle 93* has been ignored because after all, what can be gleaned from a few words? However, in terms of the development of the Creation Riddle and indeed in terms of clues to the cosmological conception of the *Exeter Book* riddle poet(s) and the wider Anglo-Saxon *Imaginary*,[44] these few fragments offer some tantalizing hints:

> Smeþr[. . . . .]ad,
> hyrre þonne heofon[. . . . .
> . . . .]   glædre þonne sunne,
> [. . . . .]style,
> smeare þonne sealt ry[. . . . .]
> leofre þonne þis leoht eall,   leohtre þon w[. . . .]

> (Smoother...
> Higher than Heaven....
>   ...brighter than the sun,
> Sharper than salt...
> Dearer than all this light, lighter than the w[ind])

Obviously, with so little to work from, one needs to be cautious. However, we may draw some inferences. For example, the fragment partially demonstrates the order of the comparatives which, as we have seen in *Riddle 40* and *Riddle 66*, can be very revealing of the world view expressed by the riddle. In particular, it shows that the large celestial comparatives "hyrre þonne heofon" and "glædre þonne sunne" did not begin the riddle. In fact, both come after "smeþr", ("smoother"), which suggests that *Riddle 93* has not followed the trajectory implied by *Riddle 66* towards a structure more like that of Genesis which would place the celestial imagery first.

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[44] The term derives from the deployment, first by Satre and Lacan, later by psychoanalysis, of the term *l'imaginaire*. The term is now used of the self-image or fantasy through which a community may conceive of itself.

A measure of how alien this ordering is to our own sense of cosmology is revealed by Williamson's reconstruction and translation of the riddle. Williamson, laudably, attempts to render a translation which is designed to convey something of the riddle to a modern audience. However, the changes evident in his "translation" amount to cultural corrections. *Riddle 93* is particularly vulnerable to such "correction" since many of the similes upon which its comparatives rest remain expressions in everyday speech, though they do not always retain their comparative form; "heavy as lead", "black as pitch", "hotter than Hell", "hard as rock" (or alternatively, "rock-hard") and "cold as ice". It is perhaps inevitable that these should colour our sense of the riddle. Nevertheless, here at least Williamson is not a *fidus interpres*, for while his translation may be *verbum e verbo*,[45] by reordering the elements of the text he ensures that it cannot be *sensum e sensu*. Thus he translates *Riddle 93*:

> "I am higher than heaven, brighter than sun,
>
> Harder than steel, smoother than…
>
> … sharper than salt,
>
> Dearer than light, lighter than wind."[46]

This translation assembles the celestial elements at the beginning of the riddle, first the heavenly spheres, then the heavenly bodies, just as in Genesis (Gen. 1:1—31). He has relocated "style" from the second half of the fourth line of our fragment to the beginning of the second line of his "translation". Worse, he has completed this line by appropriating the "smeþr" comparison from the first line of the fragment. Williamson's inference that "harder" is the missing comparative adjective accompanying "style" seems gratuitous. Moreover, the reconstitution of the widely separated elements "steel" and "smoother" as two halves of the same line, gives the impression that it is to do with the properties of kinds of materials used by humans. Williamson's translation implies a movement from the great to the small, from the

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[45] For Cicero on translation, see *Ciceronis, M. Tullii Opera Rhetorica* II, G. Friedrich, ed. (Leipzig, 1902) 383—88.
[46] C. Williamson, 1983, 153.

celestial to the base materials which make up daily human life. This structure is identical to the one we shall encounter in the next chapter in the Creation Riddles of the Child Ballad tradition where the questions typically begin with "what is higher...?" and then progress to questions like "what is heavier...?", "what is softer...?, "what is sharper...?"[47] So, Williamson's reconstruction does not reflect the structure of the original—one wonders whether, like the vernacular translator of *Riddle 40* he was drawn into reproducing some part of his own conception of Creation. In any event Williamson's "translation" is illuminating because it charts what we would expect the text to do and thus precisely demonstrates how it deviates from our expectations. What, for example, could Creation be "smeþr" than that could have the theological and cosmological importance to earn it a place above the images of the heavens and the sun? Indeed, I can find no other instance of *smeðe* in its comparative form in the Old English corpus.[48]

The comparatives of *Riddle 93* are greatly pared down in comparison with their predecessors. As we have already seen, in *Riddle 40* there is often a tension between the stated point of the comparison and the elaboration of that image by the poet, and in *Riddle 66* the handful of comparatives are elaborated by longer passages of vivid description. But in *Riddle 93* these comparative images are, so to speak, entirely "one-dimensional". The poet selects a single, and presumably defining, aspect of each image and this, and nothing else, is the point of its inclusion in the litany. One might well expect this to have the effect of further polarising the already dichotomised vision of *De Creatura*, *Riddle 40*, and, to a lesser extent, of *Riddle 66*. All the more so, since each image was apparently allotted a half-line; a situation which seems to invite a complementary opposite in the corresponding half line. But in the only line to preserve some of both half lines it seems to have had the reverse effect: "leofre þonne þis leoht eall, leohtre þon..." ("dearer than all this light, lighter than...") exhibits a associative pairing.[49] Williamson reconstructs this line as

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[47] See F. J. Child *English and Scottish Ballads* (New York, 2003), 2.

[48] *Old English Corpus*, A. di Paolo Healey, ed. 2005. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu.elib.tcd.ie/o/oec>

[49] As we shall see, historically, certain parings have become normative, and in many cases they are not dichotomous pairings.

"dearer than light, lighter than wind"[50], which, if correct, implies that the two comparatives were put together on the basis of the homonym rather than because of any particular relationship between the two images. Even if we dismiss Williamson's solution and translate *leohtre* as "brighter" rather than "lighter" (in the sense of less heavy) the elements are still far from being dichotomous.

The lean clarity of *Riddle 93*'s adjective-and-image units reveals underlying cultural associations. Let us pause here to consider each adjective in terms of how it relates to past usages and anticipates later riddle poetry: *smeþr* ("smoother"), *hyrre* ("higher"), *glædre* ("brighter"), *smeare* ("sharper"), *leofre* ("dearer") *and leohtre* ("lighter"). *Smeþr* is not to be found in either *Riddle 40* or *Riddle 66*. Both Aldhelm and Symphosius use the word *teres* ("smooth"). Aldhelm uses it of "globus astrorum" (l. 57), the stars, and Symphosius uses it to describe the horn casing of the riddle subject in *Lanterna*. It is perhaps significant that both use it to describe the outer surface of something whose dominant characteristic (at least from the perspective of the authors) is luminosity. Given how difficult a smooth surface was to achieve in antiquity and the middle ages, and how highly prized smooth objects were, it is surprising that of the three *Exeter Book* Creation Riddle versions *smeþr* only occurs in *Riddle 93*. Perhaps its presence in predominantly man-made things is the reason for its exclusion from *Riddle 40* and 66. The use of the next comparative adjective, *hyrre*, in *De Creatura* and *Riddles 40* and *66* has already been much discussed. (It is worth noting that a comparative involving the notion of width or breadth is absent from *Riddle 93*, although, because of the fragmentary nature of the poem, it is impossible to draw a conclusion from its absence.) Here it is only necessary to add that Symphosius seems comparatively uninterested in height; however the motif appears without great cosmological significance in *Tegula*, *Pluvia* and *Scalae*. *Glædre*, the next adjective, is interesting in that the image to which it refers, the sun, was given a different adjective in *Riddle 66, swiftre*. *Glædre* also carries the meaning of "pleasanter" or "kindlier", though its primary meaning is to do with brilliance; all in all, a very apt adjective for the sun. It is interesting too that

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[50] C. Williamson, 153.

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in *Riddle 66* brightness is assigned to the moon. The conception of *Riddle 93* is more congenial to a heliocentric culture such as ours in which the idea of the swiftness of the sun is incongruous. However, the swiftness of the sun was a popular trope in Anglo-Saxon literature and it is not surprising that it is present in *Riddle 66*. *Smeare*, especially in the metaphorical sense in which it applies to salt, is absent from Symphosius' *Aenigmata*, *De Creatura*, and *Riddles 40* and *66*, though Aldhelm makes saltiness a comparative in its own right. *Leofre* is equally absent in *Riddle 93*'s antecedents, though, as we shall see, it emerges again in later Creation Riddles. It is the first instance of what one may call a "subjective" quality: Vulcan's forge is indisputably hot, but something may only be dear if it is *dear to* someone. Here again, one recognizes the future direction of the Creation Riddle. *Leohtre* is more complex since, despite Williamson's reconstruction, we cannot be entirely certain whether it is used in the sense of "brighter" or "less weighty". If Williamson is right that it is used in the latter sense (as I think he is),[51] it would confirm the implication in *Riddle 40* that the feather which "on winde wæweð on lyfte", ("on the wind floats on high...") is an image of lightness, not softness. In each case the associations of *Riddle 93* move towards the conception found in the Child Ballads, the subject of the next chapter.

It is a great pity that no more of *Riddle 93* survives, not only because of its importance to the riddle tradition, but also because, despite its simple, "oral" structure, its images are strong and rather beautiful. The author of *Vercelli Homily V* must have thought so because towards the end of the piece he includes a description of God's power which, in my view, is intertextual[52] with *Riddle 93*:

his miht is ufor þonne heofon 7 bradre þonne eorðe 7 deopre
þonne sæ 7 leohtre þonne heofones tungel (l. 194).[53]

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[51] The presence of the *glædre* comparative makes it unlikely that the poet would give us another image of brightness.
[52] It is impossible to be entirely sure of the relationship between these texts because of the difficulties associated with dating them accurately and precisely. See D. G. Scragg "The Compilation of the Vercelli Book" in *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, M. Richards, ed. (London, 2001), 317—344.
[53] D. G. Scragg *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS 300 (Oxford, 1992)

(...His might is higher than heaven, and broader than the earth,

and deeper than the sea and lighter than Heaven's star.")

This passage from the homily might almost be framed as a Creation Riddle in its own right. It imagines God's might not as the destructive power which causes Noah's Flood but, as in *De Creatura*, *Riddle 40*, *Riddle 66* and *Riddle 93*, as *forgesceaft*, the Creative power, the power that "made the firmament" (Gen 1:7) and can far out-reach it. In the homily, we have a version of the "Creation comparatives" which conforms to the Christian structure and order of the images in Genesis. God makes Heaven ("ufor þonne heofon"), then separates the land ("bradre þonne eorðe") from the sea ("deopre þonne sæ") and then sets the celestial bodies on their trajectory ("leohtre þonne heofones tungel"). The association informing the adjective-and-image combinations are closer to the Ballad tradition which preserved each of them.

Of all the *Exeter Book* riddles, indeed of all the riddles in the Symphosian tradition, *Riddle 93* is the first which is not characterized by word pictures. The highly visual, descriptive scenes which epitomize the Symphosian riddle and distinguish it from so many of the other riddles of the ancient world are here entirely abandoned in favour of a stable structure into which any number of formulaic elements may be fitted. These elements are amenable to alteration to suit the riddler and his or her social context. They are appropriated by writers and composers, as in the case of *Vercelli Homily V*, and by the oral tradition. This marks the first serious breaking away from Symphosius' basic riddle form (the enigmatic description) and paves the way for other, more radical, shifts. It is this break which allowed the comparatives to be transformed into questions and separated in the later Ballad tradition into individual riddles. The question implicit in *Riddle 93*'s statement that Creation is "hyrre þonne heofon" becomes the overt question "what is higher than...?" in the Ballad tradition. The oral culture which produced the Ballads is humbler and more circumscribed than that of Anglo-Saxon England. For the Ballad

singers there is no longer a recent past or even competing culture which regards orality as high status and crucially there is no longer an epic oral tradition. The transformation of word pictures into succinct, separate formulaic elements is what allows the Creation Riddle type to find its way into folk culture when so many of the conceits of the *Exeter Book*, Aldhelm and Symphosius did not.

Conclusion

The *Exeter Book* riddles mark the moment in the arc of the Symphosian Riddle when it begins its return to the folk tradition. Unlike Aldhelm's alterations to the Symphosian form, many of which take the Riddle further into the realms of the Literary Riddle, every development in the *Exeter Book* riddles—the absence of solutions, the use of the vernacular and the apparent lack of a structuring order to the riddle subjects—moves the Symphosian Riddle towards folk culture. In terms of the Creation Riddle, the most significant legacy of the Symphosian riddle (and arguably the only element to survive in living tradition after the Norman Conquest), the *Exeter Book* charts a greater and more dramatic development than any we have seen thus far. The three riddle versions delineate a marked change in the conception of Creation, the nature of God, and of His relationship to the finite world.

Tupper's observation (above) that the Comparative Riddle form is integral to the *Exeter Book* Creation Riddle versions has long been accepted, and yet the "philosophical" implications of this have not, to my knowledge, been recognized. It is this formal characteristic which separates the *Exeter Book* Creation Riddles from other forms of Anglo-Saxon wisdom literature such *The Gifts of Men*, *The Fortunes of Men*, and *Maxims I* and *II*. The distinction is important since, in other respects, the Creation Riddles may be said to have more in common with these wisdom poems—particularly the *Maxims II* (otherwise known as the *Cotton Maxims*)—than with the other *Exeter Book* Riddles. Both the *Cotton Maxims* and the Creation Riddles are concerned with the nature of Creation and share a common imagistic vocabulary. Like the *Exeter Book* Creation Riddle versions, the *Cotton Maxims*

lines 3—10[54] deal with the abstract characteristics of Creation but crucially, in superlative not comparative form. These lines take the form of the answers to a sequence of Superlative Riddles; a riddle type particularly common in Germanic riddling, though the earliest recorded example in Western Europe is in Plutarch's *Moralia*. Superlative Riddles inevitably express a world view that is more hierarchical, hegemonic and normative than Comparative Riddles. A superlative asserts the nature, the proper nature even, of the world. By contrast, Comparative Riddles take the culturally accepted superlative answer to a question and problematize it by asking what thing could have its definitive quality to an even greater degree. Thus, the superlatives of the *Cotton Maxims* assert "winter byð cealdost" (l. 5), "winter is the coldest", where a Comparative Riddle as in *Riddle 40* asks what is "caldra þonne se hearda forst" (l. 54), ("colder than the rime frost"). Comparative Riddles express a much more ambiguous, interrogative, searching view of the world. Ultimately, this greater complexity seems better to have suited Anglo-Saxon understandings. For even at the heart of the litany of certainties in the *Cotton Maxims* one finds an assertion which undermines its project to expound the rightful order of things: "soð byð swicolost" (l. 10), ("Truth is the most deceptive"). This is the only superlative in the sequence whose meaning is not self-evident. Like a riddle in its uniting of contraries, it is only by interrogating it that we may perceive meaning in an apparent contradiction. It is a profound expression of the conviction that things are not as they seem—the underlying principle of the Riddle genre—and that it is only by interrogating "Truth" that we may perceive the true significance of things and so hope to gain an understanding of Creation. Its presence in the *Cotton*

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[54]   ...Wind byð on lyfte swiftust,
þunar byð þragum hludast.   þrymmas syndan Cristes myccle,
wyrd byð swiðost.   Winter byð cealdost,
lencten hrimigost   he byð lengest ceald,
sumor sunwlitegost   swegel byð hatost,
hærfest hreðeadegost,   hæleðum bringeð
geres wæstmas,   þa þe him god sendeð.
Soð bið swicolost,   sinc byð deorost

(Wind in the air is the swiftest, thunder is sometimes the loudest, the powers of Christ are great, Fate is the strongest. Winter is the coldest, Spring frostiest and is the longest cold, Summer fairest of sunshine, the Sun is hottest, harvest the most prosperous it brings men the year's crops which God sends them. Truth is the most deceptive, treasure is the most precious).

Maxims, embedded in a text of almost aggressive certainties, reveals the centrality of the riddlic to the Anglo-Saxon *Imaginary*.

I end this chapter with a final observation on the nature of the *Exeter Book* riddles as a whole. As I have noted above, the *Exeter Book* riddles have often been studied for what they tell us about Anglo-Saxon material culture. In particular, their interest in representing artefacts related to literature and writing has led to some very interesting observations on attitudes towards orality and literacy in the Anglo-Saxon period.[55] DiNapoli points up the contradiction that the monastic culture of Anglo-Saxon England which produced the *Exeter Book* riddles was "among the most logocentric ever known",[56] yet is implicitly hostile in its images of writing:

> "On the one hand, such negatively-charged imagery of pens as misshapen foes plundering the inkhorn's hoard of ink could represent a conventional element of riddlic disguise intended to do no more than throw a would-be solver off the trail. Yet in its utter consistency it seems less arbitrary than that, and if the horn's fall from the stag's head is imaged as a kind of death, its new life in the scriptorium is simply never seen as a joyous resurrection but rather a torment, injured by knife and raided by marauding pens whose ancestry is traced back to the carrion birds that accompany the wolf in feasting on corpses after a battle. Why the act of writing should be regularly associated with such imagery is a question I simply wish to open at this point, to point out the link made between writing and acts of violence committed upon something that was once alive.[57]

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[55] See J. Scattergood "Eating the Book: Riddle 47 and Memory" in *Text and Gloss: Studies in Insular Language and Literature* H. Conrad-O'Brien, A. D'Arcy and J. Scattergood, eds. (Dublin, 1999), 119—127., R. DiNapoli "In the Kingdom of the Blind, the One-Eyed Man is A Seller of Garlic: Depth-Perception and the Poet's Perspective in the Exeter Book Riddles" in *English Studies* 81 (2000), 422—455, P. Head *Representation and Design: Tracing a Hermeneutics of Old English Poetry* (Albany, 1997)
[56] R. DiNapoli, 427.
[57] Ibid., 425.

I would like to draw out an implication in this material that DiNapoli neglects. Whatever it may reflect about changing cultures of literacy and orality, I think it also offers a stunning insight into the nature of the *Exeter Book* Riddles. It is astonishing that in each riddle the subject is described entirely from its own point of view without reference to the interests of human society—we have already seen how images of human civilization and humanity are excluded from *Riddle 40* and they are entirely absent from *Riddles 66* and *93*. In these images of writing and literacy the use of the natural world by humanity is seen as violent and ultimately inimical. The *Exeter Book* riddle-writers, writers themselves, men to whom literature was profoundly important, here imaginatively adopt a view of the world from an empathic perspective opposite to their own. The "non-human" perspective of the *Exeter Book* riddles is a remarkable feat of self-conscious identification with the Other, a remarkable and paradoxically human feat. This feat is the direct legacy of Symphosius' riddles and to my mind represents an even more lasting and important influence than those no doubt important, definitely more quantifiable, elements of form and structure.

Chapter Four

"Riddles Wisely Expounded":
Folk Descendants of the Creation Riddle.

Question and answer. Old ways are the best ways.
—— *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, l. 474.

L ike all folk Ballads, our final "text" exists in numerous, primarily oral, versions. Though differing, these have enough in common to warrant the collective title "Riddles Wisely Expounded" (Child 1). The present chapter considers six versions of "Riddles Wisely Expounded"[1] as part of its project to trace the final stage of the Riddle's trajectory from high literature back into oral folk tradition. "Riddles Wisely Expounded" is a wit combat narrative in which the Devil puts a series of questions (many of which derive from the non-interrogative Anglo-Saxon riddles, *De Creatura*, *Riddle 40*, *Riddle 66*, and *Riddle 93*) to a young girl who, with courage, ingenuity and good sense, solves them all. Here, finally, we encounter a series of questions of the "What is...?" variety which accord with the modern view of riddles as essentially interrogative. Despite this significant shift, there are marked similarities of language and imagery between "Riddles Wisely Expounded" and Anglo-Saxon riddling, which, perhaps not surprisingly, have received little scholarly attention. By virtue of its narrative context, "Riddles Wisely Expounded" could not be more apparently different from the riddle texts of Symphosius, Aldhelm, and the *Exeter Book*. Yet, the ballad's riddle contest is, in

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[1] For full texts see appendix C.

fact, an oral development of those Anglo-Saxon riddles whose underlying and fundamental similarities to the "Symphosian" literary tradition are more important than their differences.

The designation "Riddles Wisely Expounded" was adopted by the great folklorist Francis James Child who included the ballad in his five volume collection published between 1882 and 1898. This collection, which preserves some of "the oldest surviving folk music in the English speaking world",[2] also includes several other Riddle Ballads.[3] "Riddles Wisely Expounded" is one of the most enduring in the sense that some of its riddles even made their way into other Ballads, like "Captain Wedderburn's Courtship" (Child 46). It also has the distinction of being the first Ballad in Child's collection and probably one of the oldest.[4] Child provides us with versions spanning nearly five hundred years from 1430 to 1878—and Bronson, who consciously continues Child's project,[5] collects American versions from as late as the mid twentieth century. Thanks to Child's monumental work of thorough scholarship in collecting, collating, and tirelessly seeking out ancient and contemporary oral and obscure written versions we are, with Bronson's additions, in the extraordinary position of being able to chart in detail the transformation of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" almost to our own time. Indeed, since the earliest version Child records is a medieval lyric entitled *Inter diabolus et virgo*, it is likely that we are able to witness some of the stages through which the narrative passed in

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[2] C. Darling *The New American Songster* (London, 1983), 4.

[3] These Ballads are: The Elfin Knight" (Child 2), "King John and the Bishop" (Child 45), "Captain Wedderburn's Courtship" (Child 46), "Proud Lady Margaret" (Child 47), and, one of the very few Arthurian Child Ballads, "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" (Child 31). Salz and Würzbach also regard "The False Knight Upon the Road" (Child 4) as a riddle ballad because it contains a verbal duel, a contest of insults. I have excluded it because, although it demonstrates the principles of riddling, it does not actually contain a series of questions and answers, nor even an explicit challenge as "The Elfin Knight" does. See S. Salz and N. Würzbach *Motif Index of the Child Corpus* (Berlin, 1995)

[4] Like "Riddles Wisely Expounded", "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" has medieval origins. It is most directly related to the Middle English verse romance "The Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell ", but there are at least three other Middle English versions of the Loathly Lady story, including Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Tale".

[5] Bronson's work differs in that his approach is more musicological.

its passage from the written into the popular, folk tradition.[6] In this chapter I will explore the changes in three versions of "Riddles Wisely Expounded"; in particular, I will focus on the practice of embedding riddles in narrative and how this reflects world view.

"Riddles Wisely Expounded" marks the point at which the Symphosian riddle tradition comes full circle. Symphosius drew riddles from popular tradition and alchemized them into a sophisticated literary structure in which all the riddles act in concert. Aldhelm transformed Symphosius' conception of a multifarious, but unified, collection into a visionary single riddle comprised of a series of dichotomies. In the *Exeter Book* the three versions of the Creation Riddle show increasing interaction with oral culture so that, in the last of these, *Riddle 93*, many of the dichotomies of Aldhelm's single riddle are abbreviated into oral-formulaic units. Aldhelm's dichotomies have segued into comparatives; "higher than", "wider than" which become a litany of Creation's attributes. But, as in Symphosius and Aldhelm, the *Exeter Book* versions of the Creation Riddle remain indicative rather than interrogative in form and mood. Finally, in "Riddles Wisely Expounded" the comparatives of *Riddle 93*, become individual, one line questions, each a riddle in its own right, arranged in pairs but still united as in the earlier collections by world view and now also by narrative. Henceforth, each question exists as a separate riddle which may be mixed and matched with other separate riddles from other narratives.

In "Riddles Wisely Expounded", narrative is crucial to the form, working, and significance of the riddles. Conversely, riddles are at the heart of the Ballads' narrative concerns. The riddle contest is fought at the pivotal moment of the narrative, and itself becomes the fulcrum on which the narrative turns. Thus, as Atkinson comments, riddle contests take place in "liminal situations", which include "various threshold events, in particular those concerned with courtship and marriage,

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[6] It should be noted that Child pioneered the methodology, now orthodoxy in all ethnomusicological and anthropological practice, of respectful fidelity to the actual words he heard in performance in the field without alteration or "improvement".

meeting and recognition, teaching and instruction, initiation and death"[7] and reflect whatever is at stake in the narrative. The riddle contest is an eruption at a moment of crisis which externalizes whatever tension exists within the narrative, and especially between the two riddlers. Most often, the tension has to do with the fact that one of the antagonists is in disguise. In all versions of "Riddles Wisely Expounded", the riddler is a stranger, usually a supernatural figure of some kind. In most, he approaches the young girl's house without invitation. Whatever else it may be, his presence is an invasion of the masculine into a feminine space; several versions of the ballad emphasize that the house is inhabited only by women, usually three girls and their widowed mother. Moreover, in every version, the ballad ends with the shrewd young girl defeating the attempt to abduct or banish her to the realm of the Other. In the world of the Ballads, towns, houses, and rooms are the human domain, while the "Other" inhabits undomesticated nature, especially forests and bodies of water which are usually gateways to the Other world, Elfin or Hell. The riddle contest is fought, in part, over the rightful place of women within the human/Other dichotomy. At stake is nothing less than the salvation or damnation of the girl's eternal soul.

It has become common for scholars to trace the origins of Riddle Ballads back to the *Exeter Book*. However, by linking "Riddles Wisely Expounded" specifically to the Creation Riddles and viewing its riddle contest as essentially eschatological, I am breaking with the recent trend of regarding Ballad riddling as primarily sexual in nature. Toelken, whose work established this trend, supports his sexual reading of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" by connecting them not to the Creation Riddles but instead to the *double entendre* riddles of the *Exeter Book* known as the "Obscene" riddles.[8] Toelken argues that the riddles of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" depend on sexual metaphors and that the heroine "must not only give an acceptable answer to each riddle but…she must also give the pure and

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[7] D. Atkinson *The English Tradition Ballad: Theory, Method and Practice* (Burlington, VT., 2002), 52—53, Toelken makes the same point; B. Toelken *Morning Dew and Roses: Nuance, Metaphor and Meaning in Folksongs* (Chicago, 1995), 104.
[8] B. Toelken, 111.

virginal one."[9] In his view, "listeners find humorous tension between the obscenity inherent in the way the riddle is posed and the almost naïve innocence of her answer."[10] In a development of this line of interpretation, Atkinson argues that since the riddle contest carries both rape and death as the punishment for failure, the riddles' similes allude simultaneously to ideas of sex and death: "appropriate referents suggest themselves readily enough for concepts like 'deeper than the sea' (grave/vagina) and 'sharper than the thorn' (death/penis)."[11] However, it seems to me that simultaneous "appropriate referents" do not "suggest themselves" so readily for some of the other riddles in the sequence; it is difficult to discover ideas of *both* sex and death in "softer than silk", "greener than grass,"[12] "yellower than wax," "louder than a horn," "whiter than milk," "better than bread" or even "worse than a woman was." More significantly, the connection with the Obscene Riddles seems tenuous given that "Riddles Wisely Expounded" clearly preserves the comparatives of the *Exeter Book* Creation Riddles, *Riddles 40, 66,* and *93* with their overriding imagery of Heaven and Hell, and of the features of the natural world.

The mechanics of riddles types have been considered in previous chapters[13] but it is worth pausing to look at the particular character of the comparative riddles in "Riddles Wisely Expounded" since they reveal much about the implicit world view of Ballad riddle texts. Comparative Riddles are solved by guessing what could possess the fundamental characteristic of the "primary referent"—say, the depth of the sea—[14] to an extent greater than the referent itself. In many cases, this "primary referent" is a culturally sanctioned formulation—like, for instance, "swift as the wind"—which has become so established in the language as to be idiomatic and so

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[9] Ibid., 108.
[10] Ibid., 108.
[11] D. Atkinson, 59.
[12] In fact a corrupted version of this riddle from a different ballad, "Captain Wedderburn's Courtship" *does* solve the riddle, "death is greener than the grass." (Child 46B, l. 65) But in this case, the logic of the riddle's new context in a new ballad dictates this solution. It is coupled with the riddle "what's higher than thae trees?" (Child 46B, l. 61) There is a connection between "grass" and "trees," so Mary Barr, the singer of this version of the ballad, connects their answers, "death" and "Heaven." This, more than ever, seems to obscure a secondary, sexual reading of the riddle.
[13] See above, 177—8.
[14] Since the sea is sometimes referred to as "the Deep" it is not surprising that this is the characteristic which has become associated with it.

deeply familiar as to carry something of the authority of a saying or maxim.[15] However, in requiring that the riddle reader find an answer that replaces this primary referent with a new construction involving new referents—for instance, "thought is swifter than the wind"—the Ballad riddles have the potential to undermine established categories. In effect, the Ballad riddles challenge the familiar, authoritative formulations; so "swift as the wind" becomes "what is swifter than the wind?" Furthermore, the interrogative form, in itself, is inevitably destabilizing rather than confirming. The earlier, Anglo-Saxon vision of an encompassing Creation, guarded and guided by God, is replaced with a restless questioning of the constituents of the world and its limits.

In *De Creatura* and the *Exeter Book*, Heaven, Hell, sun, moon, floods and fields, and even the insects themselves, are all part of a single Creation. These riddles turn on the fact that the smallest part of Creation is as important as, and at one with, the greatest part. They refuse to divorce the physical world from the metaphysical world; both are part of the majesty of Creation. However, in the riddle sequence of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" the riddle reader can only be successful in finding an answer which surpasses the primary referent if each question is considered in new terms. These new terms define the "ideology" of the text. In "Riddles Wisely Expounded" the primary referent is often surpassed by giving abstract solutions. So a question like "what is longer than the way?" is solved "love". In many cases, the "new terms" privilege the metaphysical world over the physical. The static majesty, abundance, and power of Creation as imagined in the Anglo-Saxon Creation Riddles are replaced by spiritual struggle and the quest for eternal salvation. Set in the context of a wit combat contest, the Creation riddle becomes the site of a battle over the nature of reality rather than an assertion of its characteristics.

In the following I will consider three main versions of "Riddles Wisely Expounded": the fifteenth century lyric *Inter diabolus et virgo*, a Regency period

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[15] For more on maxims as expressive of hegemonic discourse, see 178.

version collected from the singing of Mrs Storie by William Motherwell known as Child 1C, and a Northumberland version included in Mason's 1878 *Nursery Rhymes and Country Songs* known as Child 1E. These three texts chart the history of one branch of the ballad, the older or primary branch. As is clear from the fifteenth century manuscript, the primary branch is a wit combat narrative between the Devil and a young girl with her soul as the prize. Over the years, it has become confused with the narrative type of "[t]he Clever Lass, who wins a husband, and sometimes a crown, by guessing riddles".[16] But, as Bronson notes, the "knight was not originally of the marrying kind, and sounder tradition makes him out a fiend—even Clootie himself—to be checkmated, rather than confirmed in his election by the maid's ability to guess his riddles."[17] This conflation of the two narrative types is exacerbated by the long-standing association between riddling and marriage—we have already noted Atkinson's view that riddle contests often arise in situations "concerned with courtship and marriage".[18] In the primary narrative type, the riddle questions concern the nature of the world and who has hegemony over it. The Devil's questions imply that he is dominant and will ultimately be victorious, while the girl's answers assert a world in which God is supreme. In the secondary (and less charged) narrative type, the girl's ability to answer the question demonstrates that she is a fitting bride and will make a witty and worthy wife. Of course, our interest is in the primary narrative branch (*Inter diabolus et virgo*, 1C and 1E) in which the questions still betray their origins as comparative elements in a Creation Riddle and the riddle contest implies a cosmology.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of three final texts. The first is perhaps the fullest and best example of the secondary narrative branch, and the final pair are two American twentieth centuries versions belonging to the primary narrative branch. Between them, these texts bear witness to the disappearance of

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[16] F. J. Child *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (London, 2003), 1.

[17] B. Bronson *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* (Princeton, 1959), 3.

[18] D. Atkinson, 52—3, Toelken makes the same point; B. Toelken, 104. In many cultures riddling is part of marriage or courtship rituals. For example, see Hopkin's discussion of the *dâyage* in Lorainne: D. Hopkin "Love Riddles, Couple Formation, and Local Identity in Easter France" in *The Journal of Family History* 28 (2003), 339—363.

Creation Riddle elements from the Ballad tradition. Eventually, the primary branch disappears from living oral tradition, but is preserved as part of the contemporary interest in folk culture while the secondary narrative branch persists—albeit in a form which often excludes the riddle element of the text—in narratives of the "Twa Sisters" type.

Inter Diabolus et Virgo

Despite the similarities of its riddles to the comparatives of *Exeter Book Riddle 93*, *Inter diabolus et virgo* represents a new world view. The implicit questions of *Riddle 93* are transformed into a dialogue sequence of explicit, *agonistic* questions put by the ideologically loaded figure of the Devil.[19] With such a riddler, the stakes are raised and the contest inevitably acquires eschatological significance. As in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:4—5)[20], the Devil tempts, rather than threatens, the maiden:

> Mayd, mote y thi leman be,
> Wyssedom y wolle teche the:
>
> All the wyssedom off the world,
> Hyf thou wolt be true and forward holde. (ll. 5—8)

It is only after posing his questions that the Devil utters his threat: "But thou now answery me,/ Thu schalt for sothe my leman be." (ll. 23—24). [21] Yet the maid understands her peril from the beginning. As soon as the Devil finishes his questions she cries:

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[19] In the absence of a universally accepted specialized vocabulary, I prefer the terms "riddler" and "riddle reader" respectively, rather than "riddle questioner" and "riddle answerer" or "riddle poser" and "riddle guesser"; for the latter see J. Niles *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Text* (Turnhout, 2006).

[20] This is also the persona and role he adopts in Jesus' Temptation in the Wilderness. Indeed, in Matthew 4:3 the Devil is referred to as "the tempter".

[21] Bronson comments that narrative confusion in our earliest extant text, *Inter diabolus et virgo*, implies earlier texts, though we have no way of knowing whether these are oral or simply written texts which do not survive. See B. Bronson, 3.

Ihesu, for thy myld mygth,

As thu art kynge and knygt,

Lene me wisdome to answere here rygth,

And schylde me fram the fovle wygth! (ll. 25—28)

Presumably, Jesus hears her plea because the girl is able to answer all of the Devil's questions.

The overtly religious context is an unusual feature of this lyric and distinguishes it from the later Child Ballads which developed out of it. As has long been recognized, English Balladry (unlike that of the Continent and especially of the Mediterranean) is marked by the absence of religion. Housman writes:

The miracles of the Virgin, the acts and martyrdom of the saints, narrated in innumerable ballads of France, Italy and other countries of the South, were apparently of no importance in the life of English and Scottish ballad communities, even before the Reformation.[22]

Darling speculates that this absence may be due to the fact that "the folk were more interested in keeping alive their local and rural secular traditions than those of the church".[23] Certainly, in some later Ballads the figure of the Devil is so significantly reduced that he becomes interchangeable with other supernatural figures. It would be difficult for these shifts of persona to occur in the Anglo-Saxon riddle texts considered in the previous two chapters because their divisions are between good and evil, high and low, celestial and terrestrial. But, because the Ballad world is

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[22] J. Housman *British Popular Ballads* (London, 1952), 16. In addition to which, from at least the sixteenth-century on, there is a growing body of literature in which Mary intercedes on behalf of humanity to defeat the Devil. However, she remains pointedly absent in the ballads. Without Mary to fulfil this function, this task falls to the figure of the shrewd lass, who defeats him with riddle wit. For a discussion of this see L. de Bruyn *Woman and the Devil in Sixteenth Century Literature* (Tisbury, Wiltshire, 1979).

[23] C. Darling, 38.

divided between the human and the "Other",[24] an inhuman figure, such as the Devil, who clearly belongs in the Other realm, may easily be confused with other supernatural figures. *Inter diabolus et virgo*, however, is early enough for the Devil to be clearly realized still and consequently its riddle contest occurs within the framework closer to that of the Anglo-Saxon riddle texts, marked by infernal temptation and divine grace.

The Devil begins by attempting to undermine the vertical hierarchy of creation. He asks, "'What ys hyer than ys [the] tre?'/ 'What ys dypper þan ys the see?'" (ll. 9—10). These questions, which reduce creation to the concrete measure of "tre" and "see", implicitly deny the existence of Heaven and Hell. Moreover, the Devil's question bristles with dangers for the unwary; he is also inviting the maid to commit the same *hubris* as the House of Israel, Pharoah and the king of Babylon in Ezekial and Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel. A recurrent motif in the scriptures (particularly in riddlic passages), the tall tree is often expressive of human pride and the failure to recognize the power of God. For example, the motif of the tree is inherent in the solution to the riddle in Ezekiel 17:1—24:

And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought
down the high tree, have exalted the low tree. (Ezekiel 17: 24)

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[24] Bakhtin argues that the interchangeability of the Devil with non-Christian supernatural figures is a result of the:

> ...carnivalization of the official conceptions of hell and purgatory [which] took place throughout the Middle Ages. The elements of this process were contained even in the official 'visions' of hell. At the conclusion of the medieval period the underworld became a central theme, the crossroads of two cultures; the official and the popular tradition.

Thus in "The Elfin Knight" the figure of the title is sometimes the devil but equally, in other versions, is sometimes a fairy or even a mortal man. In "The Dæmon Lover" the figure with whom the heroine elopes is sometimes the ghost of her lover, and sometimes is revealed to be the devil himself. These metamorphoses have the effect of permanently destabilizing the notion of the devil in the ballad world. See M. Bakhtin *Rabelais and His World*, H. Iswolsky, trans. (Bloomington, IN., 1984), 394—5.

In Daniel the tree that "grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven" (Dan 4:11) is a metaphor for Nebuchadnezzar, the king who attempts to put himself above Heaven and whose his pride leads him to forget that "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Dan 4:25). Conversely, comprehending and acknowledging the "height" of Heaven is a sign of virtue and faith. In Isaiah, God says: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa 55:9) In the Book of Job we read:

> Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. (Job 11:7—9)[25]

But, the maid is a match for the Devil; she proves that a "wholesome tongue is a tree of life" (Prov. 15:4). Her answer demonstrates that she understands the true extent of Creation and of God's power in this world and the next.

Throughout *Inter diabolus et virgo*, the Devil tries to elicit answers which will deny the power of Heaven by asking questions which emphasize the physical over the spiritual. Echoing the Devil in the wilderness who challenges Jesus to "command that these stones be made bread" (Matt. 4:3) and tempts Him to prove that He can escape death (Matt 4:6), the Devil in the lyric asks the maid "what [ys] bether than is þe bred?" (l. 15) and "What ys schapper than ys þe dede?" (l. 16). These questions stress the needs of the body and the inevitability of death and by omission implicitly deny the reality of spiritual concerns and God's promise of salvation. Again, the maid rejects the Devil's frame of reference and promptly answers "Godys flesse ys betur þan ys the brede,/ Payne ys strenger þan ys þe dede"

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[25] This is a rather ambiguous passage since, though this sentiment is valid and directly affirmed by God (Job 37:5) it is used to support an argument which is not (Job 42:7). Interestingly, in the Book of Job, God talks about his power and relationship to Creation through a series of questions.

(ll. 35—6).[26] By answering "Godys flesse", a reference to the Passion and the promise of salvation celebrated in the Eucharist, the heroine is able to invoke the power of God and His victory over the forces of the evil. Indeed, simply by pairing "Godys flesse" with "brede" the maid inevitably evokes the origin of the Eucharist in the Last Supper.

In this context, we might revise our understanding of the Devil's first question, "'What ys hyer than ys [the] tre?'" (l. 9) as including a covert reference to the rood—[27] after all, it is not usual for the Ballads to refer to Jesus as the one "that died on tree" (for example, Child 39A, l. 88, Child 72C, l. 122) and equally common for the rood to be referred to as "a tre"[28] in fifteenth century lyrics. Viewed in this light, the Devil's question is also a temptation to deny the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice and the reality of His death and resurrection. But again, the maid proves herself "able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). Implicit in her answer is the assertion that Christ bares "our sins in his own body on the tree" so that we may be "dead to sins" (1Pet. 2:24). The maid's answer also cleverly addresses the Devil's attempt to inspire fear and despair by raising the spectre of human mortality (l. 16).[29] In some sense this project informs all her speech acts. In her answer, "Payne ys strenger þan ys þe dede" she takes on the theological dimension of a reference to Christ's suffering and thereby elaborates and explains her previous assertion that "Godys flesse ys betur þan ys the brede" since Christ's pain, celebrated in the rite of the Eucharist, overcame and is stronger than death. In

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[26] This couplet appears only in this version, though there are some parallels in later texts. Child 1D, for example, uses "death" to solve "what is colder than the clay?" (l.10). The question "what is sharper than…?" has already appeared in this text, and is clearly a scribal error. The scribe corrects his mistake by changing the adjective to "stronger" in the answer, "Payne ys *strenger*" (l. 36, my emphasis). Child C1 preserves the couplet's first question, but answers it, "the blessing's better nor the bread" (l. 33), which, contextually is presumably the grace said before meals.

[27] Porter and Tiusanen find a link between the image of the "tall tree" and mortality in another ballad: "The significance of "The Trees They Do Grow High"…lies in its major contrastive images, which set the vertical life-images of childhood—trees, sprouting leaves, and grass—against the horizontals of the grave and marriage bed in an astonishing counterpoint". G. Porter and J. Tiusanen "Performing Resistance to the New Rural Order: An Unpublished Ballad Opera and the Green Song" in *The Eighteenth Century* 47 (2006), 205.

[28] M. R. James and G. C. Macaulay "Fifteenth Century Carols and Other Pieces" in *The Modern Language Review* 8 (1913), 68—87, 76.

[29] *Dede* may mean "deed" or "death". "Death" seems more appropriate in context, especially given the answer.

each case, the maid rejects the secular and materialistic assumptions implicit in the Devil's questions in favour of spiritual values and the Christian world view.

The Devil's uses several different strategies in his attempt to trick the maid into a tacit denial of her faith. His question, "'What ys scharpper þan þe þorne?'" (l.11) which recalls the description of human frailty in the Book of Micah: "the best of them is as a brier: the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge" (Mic. 7:4)[30] exploits the maid's knowledge of scripture. In this instance, if the maid were to supply the Biblical answer that "the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge", she would run the risk of regarding humanity as irredeemable, thereby becoming vulnerable to spiritual despair and loss of faith. Instead, the maid again rejects the Devil's frame of reference with the answer "Hongyr" (l. 31). On other occasions, the Devil attempts to fault the maid's knowledge of scripture: thus he asks "What is rader þa ys þe day?'" (l.14)[31] to which she gives the scripturally impeccable answer, "syn" (l. 34), since in Isaiah God tells us "your sins be as scarlet…they be red like crimson" (Isaiah 1:18). The maid proves that she knows and understands her faith and cannot be faulted either through ignorance of the Scriptures or misapplication of them. To the Devil's final question "What [ys] softer ys he flax", which seems to be a veiled offer of the luxury of worldly goods, the maid answers truthfully and matter-of-factly, "Selke ys softer þan ys the flex" (l. 42). (It is perhaps significant that the virtuous woman in Proverbs also has knowledge of the qualities of flax (Pro 31:13) and silk (Pro 31: 22).)[32] The maid in *Inter diabolus et virgo* does not evade the truth that silk is softer than flax, but neither is she tempted by all that silk represents. Indeed, in the very next line, she authoritatively banishes the Devil,

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[30] The notion of the ingratitude and treacherousness of humans is integral to this comparative; a connotation that it has carried ever after—as in Shakespeare's famous adaptation of it in *King Lear*, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is/ To have a thankless child!" (*King Lear*, Act I, Sc. IV).

[31] *Rad* is an archaic adjective which may mean "swift" or "eager" (from Old English *hræd* and Old Norse *hraðr*) and also "frightening" (from the Old Norse *hræddr*). *Rad(e)* may also refer the radiance of celestial bodies. However, in this case, "rader" is a variant spelling for "redder".

[32] See B. Bronson, 7. Although the *Exeter Book* riddles often treat everyday subjects, the preference of the Anglo-Saxon Creation Riddles is for the more majestic elements of the Created world. *Inter diabolus et virgo* reclaims the ordinary and everyday as fit subjects for a Creation Riddle. Ultimately, it is over the everyday, just as much as the cosmic, that the maid and the Devil fight their battle.

"Now, thu fene, style thu be;/ Nelle ich speke no more with the!" and claims victory in the contest.

The Devil's opening gambit was to promise that, if the maid would make him her lover ("leman"), he would teach her wisdom (ll. 4—6). Next, as if to make his conquest of her absolutely certain, the Devil immediately raises his initial offer to "All the wyssedom off the world" (l. 5). Finally, after the long sequence of riddle questions and seemingly confident that the maid will now be thoroughly convinced of her ignorance, the Devil, becomes more threatening, "But thou now answery me,/ Thu schalt for soothe my leman be" (ll. 23—4). However, the maid is not cowed. She rejects the Devil's offer and seeks, not his wisdom, but the wisdom of Jesus (ll. 28—9). We have already seen that the maid exhibits both spiritual wisdom and the domestic knowledge appropriate to a virtuous young woman. But it is also the case that she can best the Devil even in the "wyssedom off the world" and is able to parry both his sexual invitation and avoid his sexual threat. In response to "What [ys] longger than ys the way?" (l. 32), a question which may be an allusion to the straight and narrow way to Heaven (Matt. 7:13), the maid's answer asserts the true basis for love and friendship between human beings, especially between men and women, even as it also evokes God's endless love: "Loukynge ys longer than ys þe way" (l. 33). In like vein, when asked: "What ys sweeter than ys the note" the maid asserts the innocence and delight of love that, unlike the carnal bondage offered by the Devil, is without threat or coercion: "Loue ys swetter þan ys þe notte" (l. 38).

From the point of view of Ballad scholarship, *Inter diabolus et virgo* is invaluable.[33] It demonstrates that some of the Child Ballads genuinely have medieval, if not older, roots.[34] Its similarity to later Ballad versions suggests that oral traditions in England and Scotland were conservative and accurate in their

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[33] Yet, its position somewhere between orality and literacy has ensured that it has received almost no critical attention, despite the current interest in the dating of the ballads, and in examining the assumptions and preconceptions which underpin previous datings.

[34] For a discussion of the historiographical and methodological issues associated with the dating of the Child Ballads, see M. E. Brown "Placed, Replaced or Misplaced?: The Ballads' Progress" in *The Eighteenth Century* 47 (2006), 115—129. It is also interesting to note that Gunnell links this lyric to the Icelandic tradition, see T. Gunnell *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (Cambridge, 1995)

preservation of "texts". Remarkably, it is closer to those versions of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" collected directly from the oral tradition (such as Child 1C) than it is to "semi-literary" Broadside versions (eg. Child 1A) even though less time separates them from the latter. Moreover, since Child 1C was collected by Motherwell more than fifty years before Child uncovered *Inter diabolus et virgo* there can be no possibility that it influenced Motherwell's text.

The preservative powers of English and Scottish traditions should come as no surprise, after all the ballad "Riddles Wisely Expounded" recapitulates a riddle sequence which had lived in oral tradition since the time when the *Exeter Book* riddles were current. Even the narrative, which the riddles considerably predate, is itself probably older than the fifteenth century manuscript of *Inter diabolus et virgo*. Bronson observes that the tune associated with this ballad "is rooted in a common idiom with Gregorian Chant" and draws specific parallels with eleventh century pieces such as the *Benedictus qui venit* from the *Sanctus* of the mass *Orbis Factor*.[35] He also argues for "a still earlier life" for *Inter diabolus et virgo* on the grounds that the change in the Devil's strategy from wheedling temptation to overt threat indicates a conflation of at least two separate narratives.[36] In relation to this latter point, I agree that our text is likely to have had a still earlier life and that it may well be a conflation of earlier narratives. But while Bronson sees this as producing "narrative confusion", my own view is that the change in the Devil's attitude, which comes after he has asked his questions but before the maid has given her answers—and which indeed motivates her prayer to Jesus—adds to the drama and complexity of the psychological contest.

So the ballad's narrative is very likely earlier than *Inter diabolus et virgo*, but the ballad's riddles, as we have seen, have pre-Conquest origins. Not only are they descended from the *Exeter Book* riddles, but they also seem to exhibit parallels with the language and imagery of other Anglo-Saxon texts, suggesting that the riddles'

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[35] B. Bronson, 3.
[36] Ibid., 3.

metaphors and associations found a strong and abiding currency in oral and folk tradition, and perhaps even in everyday speech, in Anglo-Saxon England and beyond. For example, the maid of *Inter diabolus et virgo* declares "Tonder ys lodder than ys þe horne" (l. 32), a conclusion descended from the *Cotton Maxims'* assertion that "þunar byð þragum hludast" (l. 4) ("thunder is sometimes the loudest"). These images and ideas were sufficiently important to be remembered and developed. Thus, the *Maxims* assert that "[w]ind byð on lufte swiftust" (l. 3) ("Wind in the sky is the swiftest...") but, as we have seen, *Inter diabolus et virgo* insists that there is something swifter: "þowt ys swifter þan ys the wynde" (l. 39). This change reveals a dramatic shift in perspective from a world view dominated by nature to one dominated by a lively awareness of human capacity. It also testifies to a shift from concrete to more abstract, or conceptual, thought.

Child 1C

Our next version of "Riddles Wisely Expounded", Child 1C, was recorded in the early 1800s, when Ballads were at the height of their popularity. It is the earliest version in Child's collection which has any claim to being a genuinely oral text[37] and is the closest of all Child's texts to *Inter diabolus et virgo*. However, in the centuries which separate it from *Inter diabolus et virgo*, Child 1C gained some interesting additions. The most obvious difference is that while the narrative of *Inter diabolus et virgo* is implied entirely through the dialogue of the two antagonists in direct speech, in Child 1C the encounter is reported by a narrative voice in much greater detail: thus we learn about the whereabouts and various activities of the three daughters before the riddlic exchange. In *Inter diabolus et virgo*, the Devil appears without disguise, but in Child 1C the riddler's identity is hidden from both the heroine and the ballad's audience. He is introduced as a "knicht" (l. 1) who has been "wooing at monie a place" (l. 3). Like the male antagonists of "James Harris" (Child 243) and "The Elfin Knight" (Child 2), he is an ambiguous, perhaps sinister,

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[37] For a discussion of Motherwell's methodology see M. E. Brown *William Motherwell's Cultural Politics, 1797—1835* (Lexington, 2001).

but not necessarily an evil figure; he arrives unheralded out of the wilderness and spies on the widow and her daughters before imposing himself upon them. However, the narrator's prediction that he "may beguile a young thing sune" (l. 4) seems to be confirmed when the widow and her daughters welcome him. The youngest daughter is chosen "to lye with this unco knicht" (l. 17) whereupon he challenges her to a riddle contest. On this crucial point, the causality is not entirely obvious. It would appear that, despite having been given to the "knicht", he can only claim the girl if she *loses* the contest. However, deceitfully, he tells her "ye sall be made my ain" (l. 19) only if she *correctly* guesses the riddles. Ultimately, of course, in correctly guessing the riddles she perceives his true identity and is freed from him.

The riddles in Child 1C owe much to those in *Inter diabolus et virgo*. However, there are some significant differences. Several questions have been excluded and some new ones added. Over all, there are fewer questions—there are fourteen in *Inter diabolus et virgo* as opposed to ten in Child 1C—which has the effect of focusing the contest more sharply on the point at issue; namely, the danger that the heroine will be lost to the Devil. There are some new riddles, "What is whiter than the milk?" (Child 1C, l. 31) a riddle so popular that it becomes the usual opening question in early twentieth century American versions. In general, it is the more concrete questions in *Inter diabolus et virgo*, that have disappeared, for instance, "What ys yeluer than ys the wex?" (l. 41). Those which remain are more obviously directly expressive of the ballad's themes. Some have been simply adapted: "shame", not "thunder", is now regarded as the thing that is "louder than nor a horn" (l. 27)—an alteration in the direction of the moralizing riddles of Child 1E, the most recent of all the versions recorded by Child. Essentially, at issue in each riddle is whether there is a higher spiritual reality beyond the physical, or whether the world is as the Devil represents it, with the corresponding and underlying issue that if the Devil's representation is correct, then the young girl must be lost to his power.

It is worth pausing here to note that Child 1C offers an intriguing variation on the "What is greener than...?" riddle which it solves; "The pies are greener nor the grass" (l. 27). In *Inter diabolus et virgo*, "wood" is the exemplar of greenness and "grass" is the thing which surpasses it. But Child 1C and later versions amend the question so that "grass" is no longer the answer but rather takes the place of "wood" as the primary referent. The term *pies* in Child 1C probably refers to magpies, or possibly even to the Green Woodpecker, the Latin name for which, *picus viridis*, is the origin of the English word *pies*. In either case, the iridescent sheen of their feathers which flash green in some lights might well be thought greener than grass. Child 1A and 1D give the answer "poison"; a reference, presumably, to the colour of certain forms of arsenic, a poison which became popular during the "poison epidemic" fostered by the increasing availability of poisons in early modern Europe.[38] Like some of the comparatives mentioned earlier, this comparative was fossilized in language in the expression "poison-green". Again, in keeping with its disposition to moralizing, Child 1E solves the riddle "Envy is greener than the grass", a solution that refers to the expression "green with envy" (l. 28).[39] In a related, but more ominous, vein "Captain Wedderburn's Courtship"[40] adds "death" to the long list of solutions.

In Child 1C the opening couplet of questions (which defines the contest in terms of high/low, heavenly/infernal) remains the same as that of *Inter diabolus et virgo*, and is solved in the same way. But Child 1C reinforces the religious implications of the initial couplet with "what is heavier nor the lead?/ And what is

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[38] In fact, 1A, a broadside included in, but probably pre-dating, the early eighteenth century anthology *Pills to Purge Melancholy*, would be more or less contemporary with the sensational and long-running "Affair of the Poisons" which began in the Court of Louis XIV in 1679. It was finally put to an end when a "special court, *chambre ardente*, was constituted to judge...cases of witchcraft and poisoning". R. Bentley and T. Chasteen "Arsenic Curiosa and Humanity" in *The Chemical Educator*. 7 (2002), 51—60, 55.

[39] This final development of colour taking on a symbolic value is interesting because "wode", the riddle's original primary referent, may also mean "rage" or "mad" and was the centre of a common pun in early modern England: "wild folk and madmen are linked by puns on the Middle English term "wode" (wood, mad) and by their reputation for gravitating to wooded or wilderness areas." A. Laskaya and E. Salisbury, eds. *Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, 1995)

[40] "Captain Wedderburn's Courtship" became a catch-all for riddles. Usually, it contains at least three sets of riddles from other riddle contest narratives (their corrupt form suggests they did not originate in this ballad).

better nor the breid?" (ll. 9—10), which are answered "sin" and "the blessing" respectively. The pairing of these two answers has the effect of shifting the reference to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness—which is no more than a passing allusion in *Inter diabolus et virgo*.[41] The temptation is a natural point of reference since it may, itself, be understood as a species of riddle contest.[42] In the Gospel of Matthew the Devil challenges Christ, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread" (Matt 4:3). But Jesus rejects the Devil's frame of reference by giving bread (and by extension all the goods of this world) a low valuation by comparison with the spiritual treasure of the knowledge of God and His will: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4).[43] This answer frustrates the Devil's efforts to tempt Jesus into valuing the impermanent realm of bread and stones over the eternal Kingdom of God and in so doing, to reverse the relative importance of the two realms. Correspondingly, the heroine of Child 1C makes a similar assertion and also expresses her faith in, and reliance on, God and the power of his blessing.

The Temptation in the Wilderness makes an illuminating point of comparison for the final and most significant riddle in Child 1C: "what is waur nor a woman was?" (l. 30) to which the heroine neatly answers "Clootie's waur nor a woman was" (l. 38). In both Child 1C, and in the Biblical account, the tempter, the Devil, is named in the answering of the last question or challenge and thereby bested and banished. Jesus answers the Devil's final test with the words, "Get thee hence, Satan" (Matt. 4:10) and this naming ends the trial. This principle, that names and naming have an intrinsic power, is found throughout the Child Ballads and associated traditions. In "Ribold og Guldborg", a Danish ballad related to "Earl Brand" (Child 7) we see "the belief that naming has an enfeebling or destructive

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[41] Bronson sees a long-standing association between the ballad and the Biblical episode. He attributes early narrative confusion in the ballad to "homiletic rehandling, out of memories of Christ's Temptation". B. Bronson *Tradition Tunes of the Child Ballads*, 3.

[42] For a more detailed discussion of Jesus as a riddle hero see T. Thatcher *The Riddles of Jesus in John* (Atlanta, 2000).

[43] In Genesis the physical world was brought into being by the "word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God": "And God said, Let there be light and there was light" (Gen 1:3).

effect on men engaged in fight,"[44] since the hero cannot be killed while his enemies are ignorant of his name. In "The Knight and the Shepherd's Daughter" (Child 110), the heroine's seducer attempts to hide his name and when she discovers it, he flees.[45] Naturally enough, this power also works in reverse, especially if the bearer of the name is powerful in his own right. There is a distinct reluctance in the Ballads to use the proper names of powerful figures,[46] even when they are a force for good, thus Christ is referred to as the one "that died on tree" (Child 39A, l. 88, Child 72C, l. 122). Similarly, the Devil is sometimes simply called "the Enemy" (Child 194B, l. 12) or "Man's Enemy" (Child 194A, l. 20). Where Ballad singers do use the Devil's name, Ballad publishers, at least of some early copies of the Ballads, prefer to avoid spelling it out, and so may represent it as "d-v-l."[47] Kvideland notes that in Scandinavian folk tradition "it was considered dangerous to call the Devil by his proper name,"[48] and a number of stories tell of the Devil joining card games if the players have sworn and called the Devil's name.[49] This belief persists in an expression like "talk of the Devil and you'll see his horns."[50]

The power of naming is double-edged. If it is possible to summon the Devil by naming him, it is equally possible to banish him through the power of his name. It is on this principle that the witty young girl of Child 1C is finally able to defeat her questioner. By solving the riddle "Clootie's waur nor a woman was" (l. 38), the young girl not only rightly guesses the riddle, but also uncovers the true identity of her questioner: in so doing she forces him to flee:

> As sune as she the fiend did name,
> He flew awa in a blazing flame. (ll. 39—40)

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[44] L. Wimbley *Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads* (New York, 1959), 86.

[45] We see a version of the same principle in fairytales of the "Rumplestilskin" type.

[46] This practice found in many cultures, especially those that value riddling. Plutarch tells us that riddles are used to avoid speaking directly of divine powers (*E. Del*. 389.1—8).

[47] B. Bronson *The Singing Traditions of Child's Popular Ballads* (Princeton, NJ., 1976), 278.

[48] R. Kvideland, and H. Sehmsdorf *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend* (Minneapolis, 1988), 89.

[49] Ibid., 294—295.

[50] L. Wimbley, 87.

The riddle "what is worse than a woman was?" is a fascinating index of religious and social attitudes. Over time, the question shifts so that the "woman", originally referring to "Eve", comes to represent womankind in general. Furthermore, the riddle's solution, which also names the riddler as the Devil, is most instructive about the relation of riddles to their narrative context in the Ballad tradition. The riddle displays some of the characteristics of a "neck riddle", a "curious variety of enigma", according to Taylor, which "can be interpreted only by the one who sets the puzzle. The terms used are not confusing, but the situation itself seems inexplicable".[51] The term "neck riddle" is now more generally used to mean a riddle which is, in fact, a straight-forward question but which cannot be answered because the riddle-reader lacks a vital piece of information. In most riddle contests, including the contest in Child 1C, the vital but unknown piece of information is the identity of the riddler. The final riddle is solved and the contest ended when the Riddle-reader both answers the riddle and demonstrates that he or she has accurately guessed their questioner's identity.

The "curious" nature of this kind of riddle can perhaps be explained by considering it in terms of what I describe as the "meta-contest". The meta-contest is concerned with the underlying and unspoken tension between the two riddle contestants. This tension, which brings them into conflict in the first place whether they know it or not, usually derives from whatever element of the situation is unknown to either one or both of them. Since in most riddle contests at least one of the contestants is in disguise, the question of identity, most often the riddler's identity,[52] is the unknown element. In this respect, as Frye notes, the riddle genre is "connected with the very common type of recognition scene which turns on a shift

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[51] A. Taylor "Varieties of Riddles" in *Philologica: the Malone Anniversary Studies*, T. Kirby and H. Woolf, eds. (Baltimore, 1949), 6.

[52] "King John and the Bishop" is anomalous in that it is the riddle reader who is disguised. In Germanic riddle literature the riddler is also usually the one in disguise. Oedipus is perhaps an example of a riddle-reader who is "in disguise" in the sense that no one knows who he really is. However, as he himself does not know, and as he is the one who must eventually pierce his own "disguise", the paradigm remains very similar.

of identity".[53] In all cases, the undisguised riddler has no reason to suspect that the other is not as they seem. The meta-contest is won if the ignorant riddler (usually the riddle-reader) is able to guess what it is that he or, more usually she, does not know that she does not know.[54]

So the meta-contest, which accompanies, mirrors, and is inextricably entwined with the riddle contest, is concerned with perceiving the disguise and recognizing the true identity of the opponent. Recognizing the true identity of the opponent is the key to answering their riddles and exposes the real nature of the conflict. Winning this undeclared contest—often the undisguised protagonist is not even aware of its existence—is vital to succeeding in the riddle contest proper since recognition and naming are "clearly a part of the riddling".[55] Recognition is a sign of riddle wit. If the riddler is in disguise, then success in answering the question depends upon penetrating this disguise. Alternatively, if the riddle reader is disguised, then the sign of the riddler's complete defeat is that he either remains ignorant of his opponent's identity or has to be informed of it. Neck riddles tend to appear at the end of a riddle contest and use terms that are "not confusing" because they *directly* address the issues of the meta-contest. Since some aspect of this contest is not known to the riddle reader the situation—and the riddle—are, as Taylor says "inexplicable".[56] The final riddle of Child 1C is a textbook neck riddle in that it solves both the riddle contest and the "meta-contest" with a single answer.

The final question of Child 1C, then, is loaded and requires a multivalent answer since, unlike later version, the woman it refers to is *is* Eve—though, tellingly, she is not *named* by the Devil. To understand the riddle's significance it must be

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[53] N. Frye *Spiritus Mundi: essays on literature, myth and society* (Bloomington, IN., 1976), 139. "The Knight and the Shepherd's Daughter", discussed later in this chapter is an example of exactly this kind of relationship between riddling and recognition.

[54] See also "The Elfin Knight", "Proud Lady Margaret" and "The Marriage of Sir Gawain".

[55] L. Wimbley, 304.

[56] Again J.R.R. Tolkien recognized this as an important motif and incorporated it into the riddle scene in *The Hobbit*. The important point of doubt in that scene is the ring. Bilbo does not know its importance and Gollum does not know that he has lost it and Bilbo has got it. However, Bilbo's last riddle, a neck riddle: "What have I got in my pocket?" strikes at the heart of the real point of contest and brings the situation into the open. See J.R.R. Tolkien *The Hobbit* (London, 1960), 90.

considered in the light of early modern English folk interpretations of the Fall, which tend to stress that disguise and recognition also play a role in Eden. They construct Eve's act in taking the apple as, at least in part, caused by her failure to recognize her tempter. Thus, for example, in *The Fall of Man* from the York Cycle of the Miracle Plays[57] Eve immediately answers the Devil's call by asking "who is there?"[58] The Devil, who has disguised himself "in a worm's likeness" answers "I, a friend."[59] The Eve of the York Cycle accepts this answer and takes the apple. The heroine of Child 1C is successful in her verbal duel with the Devil because she does what the folk Eve does not: she recognizes her interlocutor and names him. In Eden the Devil is successful, but in Child 1C he has met his match. The young girl has not only answered the riddle, but also guessed the identity of her questioner, given him his real name, and returned his implicit insult—the question implies that the guilt assigned to Eve reflects on women in general and the maid in particular—with an insult of her own. More importantly, and quite at odds with the contemporary theological interpretations[60] of the story, the ballad heroine's answer asserts that the Devil was Adam's betrayer, not Eve because the Devil, rather than Eve, is to blame for the Fall.

In this sense, there is a great deal at stake in the Devil's last and deciding question. In nominating Eve/woman as a superlative evil (the Devil assumes that the riddle-reader will not be able to think of anything worse than Eve/woman), the question aligns all women with Eve and places them squarely within the realm of the supernatural as enemies, like the Devil himself, of God and mankind. The witty young girl refuses this identity. Her answer emphasizes the distance between the Devil and herself. She asserts the essential humanity of women in a way that is particularly telling in the context of Child 1C which is so concerned with

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[57] Though these plays were suppressed during the Tudor period, they re-emerged in the late eighteen and early nineteen centuries. For a further discussion, see J. Elliott *Playing God: Medieval Mysteries on the Modern Stage* (Toronto, 1989)

[58] A. Cawley, ed. *Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays* (London, 1977), 20.

[59] Ibid., 20.

[60] I am indebted to John Flood who generously shared his extensive research on this topic.

establishing and measuring the relative extent and importance of the physical and spiritual domains.

The radicalism of Child 1C was not matched in later versions. Twentieth century oral versions of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" interpret the question as unambiguously and solely referring to womankind without allusion to Eve. So rather than the deed of a single woman tarnishing womankind by association, women become an exemplar of evilness in their own right, even comparable to the Devil. Such versions concede only that a "She devil's worse than woman kind",[61] "the Devil's meaner than womankind"[62], and "a foul fiend is crueller/ Than a wicked woman's will".[63] This is also true of twentieth century versions of "Captain Wedderburn's Courtship": "The devil's worse than woman's wish"[64], "the devil is worse than woman's vice",[65] and "the devil's worse than woman's tongue".[66] Indeed, with the possible exception of Florence Mixer's version which stresses that it is only "a wicked" [67] woman's will which is to be compared to the Devil, the answers are informed by an underlying misogyny which suggests that women made an excellent primary referent for a comparative on evil, even if the Devil ultimately proves the greater of two.

Child 1E

In general, later written versions of the ballad are more conservative in outlook than their ancestors. In them, the privileging of the abstract over the physical—an integral part of all riddling—becomes a vehicle for Victorian moralizing. The most extreme version of this is the late nineteenth century Child 1E, initially published in Miss Mason's *Nursery Rhymes and Country Songs*. The book's title in itself reveals

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61 Recorded by A. Peel, sung by Mrs Rill Martin, Giles Country, VA., 1922.
62 A. and E. Lomax, LC Archive of American Folk Song, Album I, rec. 4AI, sung by Mrs. Texas Gladden, Salem, Va., 1941.
63 Sung by Florence Mixer, Stonington, Maine, 1936, reprinted in B. Bronson, 8.
64 Greig MSS., I, 165, sung by J. Spence, 1906.
65 Greig MSS., II, 149, sung by J. Mowat, New Pitsligo, Aberdeenshire, 1907.
66 "A Gentle Young Lady", recorded by Samuel P. Bayard, sung by Albert E. Richter, South Connellsville, PA., 1946.
67 See B. Bronson, 8.

that the ballad had been relegated to the far lower status, fit only for rustics and children. In this version there is no *anagnorisis* because the "stranger" (Child 1E, l. 6) overtly declares the nature of the contest three times and on the second he also declares his own identity (Old Nick) as an integral aspect of the challenge:

> Now answer me these questions six
> Or you shall surely be Old Nick's. (ll. 14—5)

The subtle but important shift in the contest itself is reflected in the absence of the traditional opening couplet, "what is higher than...?", "what is lower than...?" Each tidy couplet of questions is answered by a pair of "moral" abstractions which become almost allegorical figures. These abstractions refer to human passions which are stark, and largely ignoble. At stake in the conflict are worldly versus moral categories rather than the large eschatological and religious issues of the ultimate nature of the universe and God's power over it.

The first couplet "what is greener than the grass?/ What is smoother than crystal glass?" (ll. 18—9) is answered "Envy" and "Flattery"; two opposite but equally unproductive responses to the talents of others. The second couplet of questions, "what is louder than a horn?/ what is sharper than a thorn?" (ll. 20—21), answered "rumour" (l. 30) and "hunger" (l. 31) respectively, owe the most to older riddle ballads and are the least moralistic. The third couplet is unusual in that it is dichotomous in both its imagery and solutions: "what is brighter than the light?" (l. 22); "Truth", and "What is darker than the night?" (l. 33); "Falsehood". In the context, these answers may be understood as simply alluding to the absence or presence of deception, or as a reference to the True Faith as opposed to the Devil's falsehood. But the terms also have a serious currency as abstract philosophical categories; a fact perhaps reflected in the more elemental imagery. The next couplet takes us to intimate human responses: "what is keener than an axe?" (l. 24); "Revenge", and "What is softer than melting wax?" (l. 25); "Love". This last answer is in contrast to earlier versions of the ballad (especially those from the

secondary narrative branch, as we will see) which regard, not melting softness, but the more substantial characteristics of constancy, loyalty, endurance, and transcendent loveliness as exemplifying the nature of love. The ninth and final question is the most intriguing. It is the only riddle in Child 1E which is not part of a couplet and it does not deal in "moral" categories. Indeed, it seems to betray its origins as a Creation riddle. One might have expected that this question, "What is rounder than a ring?" (l. 26), would require an answer that elaborates the love motif of the previous riddle. But instead, the ring is to be understood as symbolic of wholeness, order, and perfection. And what could be more whole, more ordered, and more perfect than that? The answer, "the World", is one which Aldhelm might approve.[68]

"Riddles Wisely Expounded" in Modern Oral Tradition

The symmetrical arrangement of the questions in Child 1E is made possible by neatening alterations which suggest a literate editing of the oral text. Child 1E, then, is a version of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" which has been taken to its logical extreme in a particular direction and has been consciously adapted to express a didactic moral perspective—it is not surprising that this version held almost no interest for the oral tradition. Oral versions of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" collected in the twentieth century have most in common with earlier oral versions like Child 1C, though they tend to be shorter and in some respects simplified. The version collected by Alan Lomax in 1941 from the singing of Mrs. Texas Gladden which he refers to as "The Devil's Nine Questions" is a typical example—though curiously, like the almost identical version (collected by Alfreda M. Peel in 1922 also under the title "The Devil's Nine Questions") it only includes eight questions. The 1941 version of "The Devil's Nine Questions" opens with the Devil's threat that if the riddles are not answered, "you're one of mine".[69] The riddles are in four couplets, and have answers we have encountered before: "Snow is whiter than the

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[68] It is also interesting to note that of all the new questions in Child 1E, this last is the only one to have been adopted into the oral tradition.

[69] A. and E. Lomax, LC Archive of American Folk Song, Album I, rec. 4AI. Sung by Mrs. Texas Gladden, Salem, Va., 1941.

milk", "Down is softer than the silk", "Heaven's higher than a tree", "Hell is deeper than the sea", "Thunder's louder than a horn".[70] With the exception of "Death" as the answer to "what is sharper than a thorn",[71] the riddles have remained remarkably unchanged in their order and content from *Inter diabolus et virgo*; even the slightly archaic use of the definite article is preserved in the first and second riddles. However, the final couplet, the most altered, demonstrates that much of the original Biblical intertext has receded. The sentimentalism of "A babe's more innocent than a lamb" and the colloquialism of "the devil is meaner than womankind"[72] suggest that singers did not have the scriptures uppermost in their thoughts; perhaps a sign that riddling was no longer thought a fit vehicle for allusion to Holy Writ. The contest between the Devil and the girl no longer re-enacts the temptation in the Garden of Eden. Rather it is the expression of the common association of the wife with the Devil in early twentieth century American folk culture, as attested in Lomax's observation that in many rural American communities "if a man divorces his first wife, and marries again unhappily, they say that he has 'swapped a witch for the devil.'"[73]

The extent to which the ballad had fossilized by the time of Lomax' version suggests that it was no longer culturally resonant. Bronson notes that the tune bears no relationship to the tune associated with the earlier English versions which leads him to surmise that "the ballad was transported [to America] on paper, rather than in the head".[74] This alone suggests that the popularity of the "Riddles Wisely Expounded" ballad type was fading and that the secondary branch, in which the riddle contest serves as a combined wooing and testing of a potential bride, was overtaking it in popularity. As the cultural status of riddles diminished, the context of romantic love must have seemed more appropriate for a riddle contest than one about the temptations of the Devil.

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] A. and E. Lomax, LC Archive of American Folk Song, Album I, rec. 4AI. Sung by Mrs. Texas Gladden, Salem, Va., 1941.
[73] A. Lomax *The Folk Songs of North America in the English Language* (London, 1960), 174.
[74] B. Bronson, 3.

Child 1A and the Second Narrative Branch of "Riddles Wisely Expounded"

It is not difficult to see why the secondary narrative branch eventually became more popular than the primary one; it is a charming story with a happy ending. However, it was a development which effectively ended the Creation Riddle as a living expression of human wonder at, and inquiry into, the mystery of the universe. I will conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the structure and concerns of the Broadside Ballad Child 1A, which is one of the earliest examples of this secondary branch.

Child 1A relates a rather domestic, even domesticated, version of the tale in which the fair maiden, the youngest daughter of the house, wins the noble knight by dint of her success in the riddle contest. The riddler is "a knight of noble worth", a man "of courage stout and brave," travelling because "[a] wife he did desire to have." (ll. 5—8). Unlike most riddlers in the Child Ballads, his identity is not at issue. Moreover, his intentions are clear and uncharacteristically honourable, the heroine is a dutiful and "lovely bride" (l. 44), and overall the ballad affirms the existence of true love. Quite how unusual this is cannot be overstated; it is more usual in the grim world of the Ballads that the woman is raped and must resort to her wits to trick her attacker into marrying her, as in "The Knight and the Shepherd's Daughter" (Child 110).

In Child 1A, the knight requests that the youngest daughter answer "questions three" (l. 21)—although he actually asks her three *pairs* of questions. The origin of the riddles in the primary branch of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" tradition is evident here. However, though each element in the pair clearly bears a relationship to the other, they are not straightforward opposites. The first pair, "O what is longer than the way,/ Or what is deeper than the sea?" (ll. 27—8) is clearly a corruption of the opening pair of questions of *Inter diabolus et virgo* which is about the "high/ deep" opposition. In Child 1A, the questions are adapted to suit the topic

of romantic love, and are found in most versions of this branch of the ballad. The first question (the fifth in *Inter diabolus et virgo*) allows the contest to begin with a question solved by "love": an appropriate riddle for the testing of a future wife. The second pair, "'Or what is louder than the horn,/ Or what is sharper than a thorn?'" (ll. 29—30), occupy the same place in the sequence and have the same solutions as in *Inter diabolus et virgo*. However, it is the final question which holds the greatest interest because, as we have seen, it is important in the primary branch of "Riddles Wisely Expounded", namely, "what is worse then [sic] a woman was?" (l. 32). This question which, as we have seen, refers to Eve and the Temptation in the Garden of Eden and was intrinsic to the confrontation of a girl and the Devil, is turned to good effect; the Temptation is equally applicable to a narrative about marriage and the issue of trust between husband and wife. In the sanguine Child 1A, the heroine rejects the equation of Eve with woman/wife. Thus the riddle does not make womankind an exemplar of evil—unlike some of the versions discussed above. Instead, Eve's actions are regarded as reflecting on herself only and even then Child 1A concludes that the blame should rest more heavily on the tempter: "'the Devil is worse than woman was'" (l. 38). Moreover, the tenses of the verb to be imply that the Devil is a more significant and ongoing threat. Thus the contest is framed by questions about the nature of love and marriage, which the girl answers so as to demonstrate that she will "constant prove" (l. 47) and make the knight "exceeding glad" (l. 40). The riddle sequence is firmly dominated by its first and last images and the knight marries the witty young girl on the basis of what she has revealed about herself in answering the questions.

Despite Child 1A's light and cheerful tone, the riddle sequence is dominated by rather grim imagery. The answers "Hell", "hunger", "poyson", and "the Devil" are an almost apocalyptic quartet. Of these, "poyson", is a new answer to the question "what is greener than the grass?" (l. 31), which we have seen in earlier versions of the ballad. Although, in fact the primary use of poison was in political or

aristocratic assassinations (the French dubbed it "inheritance powder"[75]) it was associated with witchcraft and, because it requires no strength to use, came to be regarded as a feminine instrument of murder used by wives against husbands and other male relatives. In Child 1A, the image of poison is no more than an ominous undertone, but its appearance is perhaps a precursor of the increasingly misogynistic tone of later versions of "Riddles Wisely Expounded".

The rise in the popularity of this secondary narrative branch of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" coincides with the decrease in popular interest in riddles and riddling. Indeed, it mainly survives into modern times in individual motifs which other Ballads have absorbed. For example, Gilbert's 1823 version of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" was collected under the title "The Three Sisters"; a sign that the ballad was already being associated with other narrative types, in this case specifically the ballad "Twa Sisters" (Child 10). The last vestiges of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" may be seen in Tom Waits' recent recording of "Two Sisters" included on his 2006 album *Orphans: Brawlers, Bawlers and Bastards*. His version, which is descended from the same tradition as the version collected by Max Hunter from the singing of Mrs. Pearl Brewer, Pocahontas, Arkansas on November 12, 1958, preserves several details from Child 1A. Like Mrs. Brewer's version, the song's beginning, which describes the domestic arrangements of the antagonists, owes much to Child 1A. Also drawn from Mrs. Brewer's version (and absent from early versions of the "Twa Sisters") are the details that the suitor is a stranger rather than a local boy and that sisters live with their (apparently) widowed mother. The influence of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" also seems also to have dictated that there are more than *two* sisters. But the fact that the riddles and the riddle contest, the oldest and most demanding aspect of Child 1A, have not survived in Ballads of the "Twa Sisters" type is significant.

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[75] See V. Dembitsky and D. Levitsky "Arsenolipids" in *Progress in Lipid Research* 43 (2004), 403—448., R. Oremland and J. Stolz, "Arsenic, Microbes and Contaminated Aquifers" in *Trends in Microbiology* 13 (2005), 45—49.

The decline in the popularity of riddling had the effect of polarizing riddle Ballads so that they become either a narrative without riddles or a riddle sequence with only the barest implied narrative. These non-narrative riddles found their way into new songs. The riddles of "Captain Wedderburn's Courtship" (Child 46) and "Proud Lady Margaret" (Child 47) supply the inspiration for the riddles in "The Cherry Song", while the riddle-tasks in "Lady Isabel and the Elfin Knight" (Child 4) supply the basis for the riddle-tasks in "Scarborough Fair". The riddle in "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" (Child 31)—infamously popularized by Freud—"what do women want?"[76] has been the title of a film directed by Nancy Meyers in 2000,[77] an Australian political party,[78] and a Malaysian reality television series.[79] Though the riddles of Child 4, 31, 46, and 47 are, like all riddles, in some peripheral way concerned with the nature of the things, it seems that the Creation riddles of Child 1 which more particularly seek to understand the nature of things, were no longer resonant. Riddles have ceased to be the means by which divine mysteries are opened.

The Riddle's Return to Low Culture

As this discussion has demonstrated, "Riddles Wisely Expounded" operates differently from *Symphosii Scholastici Aenigmata*, *De Creatura*, and *Riddles 40, 66 and 93* because it is not a product of "high culture".[80] Despite McLane's warning that critical discourse around Ballads and Balladeering has "long served to install rather than surmount barriers: barriers between, for example, "oral tradition" and "literary culture," between illiterate "old women" singers and male literati, between notionally primitive pasts and polemically progressive presents",[81] there is a basis for the application of some of these distinctions to the Ballads. Mainly the Ballads

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[76] E. Jones *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (Ann Arbor, 1961), 377.

[77] *What Women Want*, Dir. N. Meyers, Paramount Pictures, 2000.

[78] *Current Register of Political Parties*, The Australian Electoral Commission, 2009, <http://www.aec.gov.au/Parties_and_Representatives/party_registration/Registered_parties/>.

[79] *What Women Want*, 8TV, Bandar Utama, 14/12/2006—1/3/2007.

[80] The use of this term is not intended as a judgment of worth, literary or otherwise, but rather reflects the distinction drawn by the society which produced the Ballads.

[81] M. McLane "Dating Orality, Thinking Balladry: of Milkmaids and Minstrels in 1771" in *The Eighteenth Century* 47 (2006), 131—149, 131.

have existed in the oral tradition in a period in English and Scottish history which privileged literacy. As oral works, they have belonged to folk or popular tradition. When they do, on occasion, find their way into writing—for the Ballads "often circulated from print to oral transmission and back again"[82]—it tends to be in "low culture" forms, such as Broadsides. Even the fifteenth century version of "Riddles Wisely Expounded" found in the Rawlinson manuscript (MS. D 328) under the name *Inter diabolus et virgo*, shows signs of low status. Howes notes what he terms the title's "odd Latin", asking "can *inter* be an abbreviation of *interrogant?*",[83] but perhaps it is more accurate simply to see it as bad Latin.

Where all our previous texts were composed by educated men, the opposite is likely to be true of "Riddles Wisely Expounded"; in all probability, the Ballad genre was primarily sung and composed by lower class women. The musicological evidence suggests that these songs may have been "women's songs"; their structure is most obviously suitable for accompanying traditional women's work. This is born out by field recorders. For example, Lomax notes that "the ballads have been women's songs, attached to the household and the fireside…If the men sang the old ballads, this was in the presence of women and was a recognition of feminine interest".[84] Symonds concurs.[85] However, in the opinion of Buchan and Rieuwerts, the notion that Ballads were a female form may be the result of prejudices amongst field recorders in combination with a range of social factors—including the lack of formal education for women which, according to Buchan, would make them more rooted in past oral traditions.[86] Whether women's songs represented the whole of the tradition or only half of it, it is certainly true that the material salvaged by field researchers represents a women's tradition. The point is illustrated by the case of Anna Gordon Brown, one of the most important and prolific sources of Ballads for

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[82] R. Perry "Brother Trouble: Incest Ballads of the British Isles" in *The Eighteenth Century* 47 (2006), 288—307, 290.
[83] F. Howes "Folk Song" in *The Musical Times* 102 (1961), 32.
[84] A. Lomax *The Folk Songs of North America in the English Language* (London, 1960), 169.
[85] D. Symonds *Weep Not For Me: Women, Ballads, and Infanticide in Early Modern Scotland* (University Park, PN., 1997), 18.
[86] See S. Rieuwerts "The Folk-Ballad: Illegitimate Child of the Popular Ballad" in *Journal of Folklore Research* 33 (1996), 221—226, 223, and D. Buchan *The Ballad and the Folk* (London, 1972), 76.

early collectors. Despite her vast personal repertoire of traditional Ballads, her father was completely unaware of her expertise or of the form itself. In response to seeing a book of Ballads collected from his daughter, he wrote: "Both words and strains were perfectly new to me…and proceeded upon a system of manners, & in a stile of composition, both words & music, very peculiar, & of which we could recollect nothing similar".[87] While perhaps not all men were so excluded from the Ballad tradition, it is rather striking that Anna Gordon Brown could have known nearly fifty Ballads, which she claims to have learnt from the household servants, while her father had never heard a single one.

The same opposition of class and gender is found in the difference between the prospective audience for the riddles of Symphosius, Aldhelm, the *Exeter Book*, and for "Riddles Wisely Expounded". In their erudite allusions and complex wit, Symphosius' riddles are addressed to educated, well-read readers. Aldhelm challenges the *sophi* ("wise men") to answer *De Creatura*, and the *Exeter Book* riddles are left "wisum woðboran" ("for a wise poet") to answer. However, "Riddles Wisely Expounded" is, like so many folk texts, dominated by socially disadvantaged or excluded heroines. The Riddle genre, so obvious a vehicle for high culture learning and education in Aldhelm's England, becomes in "Riddles Wisely Expounded" an equally obvious instrument for the figure of the shrewd young girl, who combines lack of physical strength with a range of social disadvantages—her youth, her class, and of course her gender—and so must rely on her wits, to win out against the odds.

The riddles' intended audience is reflected in the methodology, the canny turn of mind—what I term "riddle wit"—which proves effective in solving them. In turn, the qualities thus validated reflect the values of the culture (or in this case, the sub-culture) which produced the riddles. For the riddles of Symphosius and Aldhelm to be understood and "solved" the audience must match their authors'

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[87] W. Montgomerie *Bibliography of the Scottish Ballad Manuscripts, 1790—1825* (Edinburgh, 1956), 144—145.

education, knowledge of Classical literature and, in Aldhelm's case, his theology as well. Symphosius and Aldhelm challenge us to engage with their reflections about the physical and metaphysical world, and to observe the intricacy of their riddling. But in "Riddles Wisely Expounded", the riddles may only be solved by the heroine's rebelliousness of mind which refuses to accept things as they seem; to accept them would endorse the validity of the hierarchy which devalues her—and the ballad's audience.

In this thesis, I have spent some time considering the unusual phenomenon of collections of solved riddles (like those of Symphosius and Aldhelm), but perhaps this is the obvious form for riddles devised by members of a social and cultural elite, since entitled riddles are not *agonistic* but rather the expression of a shared literary culture. Ong argues that one of the features of oral societies is that, "a request for information is commonly interpreted interactively as antagonistic" and it is for this reason that "instead of being really answered, [it] is frequently parried."[88] The corollary of this is that in literate societies where information can be stored in writing, questions are no longer regarded as hostile. The *Exeter Book*, as a written and *un*solved collection, may seem to be an exception to this, but in fact it proves the rule. Here supplying the solutions correctly involves knowledge of the world and understanding of metaphors. Indeed, Marino argues that the point is not so much to solve the *Exeter Book* riddles as to understand them: "[s]olving the [*Exeter Book*] riddles has historically been confused with eliminating the intrinsic mystery that many of the riddles have. After these have been solved, they become most interesting."[89] In other words, the *Exeter Book*, like other written riddle collections, is made up of riddles which are an invitation to understanding, not a threat.

By contrast, the riddles of the Ballad world are posed by deceptive and dangerous figures. They are not an invitation to contemplate God and His handiwork, but are rather an ultimatum; as we have seen the fifteenth century Devil

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[88] W. Ong *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (London, 2002), 68—9.
[89] M. Marino "The Literariness of the Exeter Book Riddles" in *Neuphilologische Mittelungen* 79 (1978), 258—265, 259.

of *Inter diabolus et virgo* threatens "But thou now answery me,/ Thu schalt for sothe my leman be" (ll. 23—24). His twentieth century counterpart claims with equal menace "you must answer my questions nine,/ or you're not God's, you're one of mine".[90] Moreover, because these are narrative texts, the riddle questions are not addressed to the audience. Rather, the audience is witness to the efforts of the protagonist to achieve riddle wit. In the Ballad world of "Riddles Wisely Expounded", riddle wit depends on the insight that things are not as they seem. The riddle reader must see through the Devil's disguises and his falsehoods to see things as they really are.

Pepicello and Green have argued that riddles depend "on the ability of language to create multiple frames of reference".[91] The language of riddles is innately duplicitous. It seeks to misdirect the riddle reader's attention to prevent them from perceiving its multiplicity. Instead it encourages them to focus on a single, and it emerges, incorrect, frame of reference. Riddles encourage us to think within one framework, while the answer we seek can only be gained by thinking within another. The ability to tell the metaphorical from the literal, the ability to recognize the true situation, the true order of things, characterizes riddle wit. In a contest of knowledge, the more powerful figure wins because knowledge depends on social advantage. However, in a test of wit social advantage counts for much less, as "Riddles Wisely Expounded" (and other folk forms) which "appeals to a process of thought rather than to an inventory of knowledge"[92] demonstrates.

In "Riddles Wisely Expounded" we are not dealing with wit combat situations in which "the 'correct' answer to a riddle is whatever the poser says is right."[93] Rather, if the answer fulfils the criteria set by the question then it wins the point regardless of whatever answers the riddler may have had in mind. This is a

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[90] A. and E. Lomax, LC Archive of American Folk Song, Album I, rec. 4AI, sung by Mrs. Texas Gladden, Salem, Va., 1941.

[91] W. Pepicello and T. Green *The Language of Riddles: New Perspectives* (Columbus, 1984) 13.

[92] P. Taylor and W. H. Auden, *The Elder Edda: a Selection* (London, 1973), 21. Taylor and Auden make this point in order to differentiate riddles in general from the Germanic tradition of riddling which does require its riddle-readers to demonstrate "an inventory of knowledge".

[93] J. Niles *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Text* (Brepols, 2006), 23.

necessity within the narrative fiction of the contest because otherwise the riddler would always decide in his own favour. If the Devil in "Riddles Wisely Expounded had the ability to determine the correct answer, the world would be subject to his power. But this is not the way things are in the Ballad world. On the contrary, the Devil is most often defeated. The victory of the young girl is an endorsement of her world view.

Conclusion

Das Rätsel gibt es nicht.[1]
—— Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Proposition* 6.5

I began this thesis with a quotation from Plutarch in *The E at Delphi* in which he insists that it is "only natural that the greater part of what concerns the god should be concealed in riddles".[2] This is the governing assumption in the texts studied in this thesis, each of which uses the Riddle as a means to exploring and meditating upon the nature of things and even upon the nature of the Divine. The notion of the Riddle as a way of approaching the divine is shared by early churchmen like Augustine, Isidore of Seville, Bede, and Aldhelm.[3] Yet, despite its prominence in the thought of influential figures of Christian tradition, it is the aspect of riddling most incongruous to modern sensibilities. Indeed, taking their cue from Freudianism, some scholars regard riddles as primarily an expression of sexuality.[4] (According to Lees and Overing, such a view is "a critical commonplace.")[5] Abrahams describes the Riddle as a kind of "epistemological foreplay",[6] while Tiffany argues that the form itself is "a verbal striptease".[7]

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[1] "The riddle does not exist". L. Wittgenstien, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, C. Ogden, trans. (London: Routledge, 1922) 6.5.
[2] F. Babbitt, trans., 203. For the full Greek text of this quote, see 1.
[3] Augustine, *De Trinitate* 15. 9; Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1. 37. 22. 26; Bede, *De schematibus et tropis*, C. Kendall, ed. and trans. (Saarbrücken, 1991), 194,
[4] Eleanor Cook is a notable and welcome exception.
[5] C. Lees and G. Overing *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia, 2001), 54.
[6] R. Abrahams "The Literary Study of the Riddle" in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 14 (1972), 177—197, 178.
[7] D. Tiffany "Lyric Substance: On Riddles, Materialism, and Poetic Obscurity," *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2001), 72—98, 79.

However, perhaps most telling in terms of the demise of the Riddle is Wittgenstein's assessment that "[t]he Riddle does not exist".[8] His rejection is part of a wider rejection of the metaphysical and miraculous, a view which found its most pronounced expression in the attempts of Logical Positivist philosophers to de-mystify the world.

This move away from riddles and riddling also occurs in modern Christian religious tradition. For, though it may come as a surprise to those conversant only with the King James translation, ancient versions of the Bible frequently refer to riddles. In the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, and even the Vulgate, the Riddle (*chiydah*, *αἴνιγμα* and *enigma* respectively) is the vehicle of various kinds of divine revelation. In Numbers, Psalms, Proverbs, and Daniel the ability to speak riddles and to understand them is the sign of a wise man or prophet. In Ezekiel 17:2, God warns the House of Israel against pride and impiety by means of an allegorical riddle.[9] In Numbers 12:8, God acknowledges that He reveals Himself to humanity in riddles (with the exception of Moses, to whom He speaks "mouth to mouth"). In 1 Corinthians, 13.12,[10] God's obscurity to human perception is likened to a riddle seen through the distorting medium of a bronze mirror.[11] It is only in death that we can see God directly and so pass from the darkness of incomprehension into the ineffable light of completed understanding. But, English translations of the Bible resile from the whole notion of riddling, particularly in those passages where riddles are the medium through which God speaks. And perhaps because of a sense

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[8] L. Wittgenstien, 6.5: „Zu einer Antwort, die man nicht aussprechen kann, kann man auch die Frage nicht aussprechen. Das Rätsel gibt es nicht. Wenn sich eine Frage überhaupt stellen läßt, so kann sie auch beantwortet werden." ("For an answer which cannot be expressed the question too cannot be expressed. The riddle does not exist.")
If a question can be put at all, then it *can* also be answered.") In fact, this tautological definition, defining the Riddle as something which cannot exist and in this sense, Wittgenstein is misusing the word. The very fact of his defining the word in such a way and of his impatience with any more serious consideration of the ideas connected with riddling is part of his de-mystification of the world.
[9] This makes it very close to parable. In fact, the translators of the Septuagint diverge from the old Hebrew and render it *διήγημα*, "a tale". The notion of a riddle as a parable or warning sheds light on why the Septuagint translates the Hebrew *shammah* in *Deuteronomy* (28:37) with *αἴνιγμα*. The Hebrew means "a horror": here a riddle is an example through which others may learn.
[10] I am referring here, of course, to the Greek New Testament and not the Septuagint.
[11] Ancient mirrors were made of polished bronze and so yielded a very poor reflection.

that the Riddle is not suitably serious, successive translators have gradually erased references to it. In the case of the King James Version, the word riddle is rendered in periphrastic and euphemistic phrases such as "dark sayings", "dark sentences", or "dark proverbs". (Indeed, the euphemistic phrase "through a glass darkly" has become proverbial in English.) This practice is a remarkably clear index of changing cultural attitudes since Bible translators, mindful that they are dealing with the Word of God, are usually highly conservative.

The Septuagint, the Vulgate, and the King James Version all translate the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew so a comparison of their choices of vocabulary is instructive. In the original Hebrew, *chiydah*, "riddle", occurs in ten passages. Similarly, in the Septuagint there are nine passages and in the Vulgate eleven passages which use the word αἴνιγμα or *enigma*. By contrast, the word "riddle" appears in only two passages in the King James Version. The 1611 preface sheds some light on why this might be. The translators explain: "wee have not tyed our selves to an uniformitie of phrasing, or to an identitie of words" because "there bee some wordes that bee not of the same sense every where".[12] This is an admirable methodology in many ways, but one which easily permits extraneous cultural assumptions to creep into a translation. Accordingly, the King James Version all but excises the word "riddle" from the Bible. The conception that riddles are a means to understanding the Divine is alien to the King's translators and the whole notion of enlightenment through obscurity is contrary to their manifesto. Indeed, the phrase "dark sayings" or "dark sentences" which they substitute for "riddle" is echoed in their account of what they wish to eliminate from their translation: "we have shunned the obscuritie of the Papists...whereof their late Translation is full, and that of purpose to darken the sence."[13]

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[12] "The Translators to the Reader" Preface, Epistle and Dedicatorie, King James Version. 1611. For a fuller discussion of the translators' methodology, see D. Weissbort and Á. Eysteinsson *Translation: Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 2006), 115—20.
[13] For further discussion and a table giving the translation of the word "riddle" in various versions of the Bible, see appendix D.

Rejected by the concrete, rationalist, Logical Positivist inspired ethos of the modern world, by the Christian tradition, and even, in large measure, by the folk tradition, is the Riddle obsolete? Perhaps it is. And yet, as the progression traced in this thesis demonstrates, riddles are remarkably enduring. In tracing the particular arc of this thesis, I was forced to set aside other riddle arcs and histories of equal interest. Perhaps the most engrossing of these would begin with the relationship between riddling and poetry in early England—since the vogue for riddling ensured that at its very inception, so to speak, English poetry has been influenced by riddling—and would follow this relationship through to modern times. The examples are numerous, one might cite for instance, the three riddles associated with the three caskets in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*,[14] the crucial "incest" riddle in *Pericles*,[15] or the famous riddlic prediction that "none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth"—grimly solved when Macbeth realizes that "MacDuff was "from his mother's womb/ Untimely ripp'd" (5.8. 15—6).[16] Poets from Wyatt—for example the suitably puzzling "A Riddle of a Gift Given by a Lady" and the rather Symphosian "Description of a Gun"—to Plath's equally Symphosian "Metaphors" write riddles.

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[14] *The Merchant of Venice* 2. 7; 2.9; 3.2. <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/merchant/merchant.2.7.html>; <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/merchant/merchant.2.9.html>; <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/merchant/ merchant.3.2.html>. The first riddle is, "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire" but upon opening the golden casket the "solution" is revealed to be a skull with a manuscript in its eye socket which reads "All that glitters is not gold". The second riddle is, "who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves" but upon opening the silver casket, the solution is discovered to be a picture of "a blinking idiot" offering a note which reads "Some there be that shadows kiss;/ Such have but a shadow's bliss". The third riddle is, "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath". Inside the lead casket, Bassanio finds a portrait of Portia, and another scroll which says "You that choose not by the view,/ Chance as fair and choose as true".

[15] *Pericles* 1.1. 647—1 <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/pericles/pericles.1.1.html>.

> I am no viper, yet I feed
> On mother's flesh which did me breed.
> I sought a husband, in which labour/
> I found that kindness in a father:
> He's father, son, and husband mild;
> I mother, wife, and yet his child.
> How they may be, and yet in two,
> As you will live, resolve it you.

The sources for this riddle can be traced through *Apollonius, King of Tyre* to Symphosius.

[16] *Macbeth* 4.1. 78—80. <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/macbeth/macbeth.4.1.html>. This "riddle" is also found in a ballad related to "Riddles Wisely Expounded"; another direct connection.

However, despite this wealth of material, it is also true to say that the composition of riddles remains a somewhat marginal activity within mainstream English poetry. In my view, the more significant manifestation of riddling is in the conception of poetry inherent in the English tradition. I would like to conclude this thesis by suggesting that, in the English tradition, all, or almost all, poems are a kind of *enigma*. Poetry is the form of literature which has the greatest array of language resources at its disposal: a poem may develop its theme not only through imagery; that is by analogy, simile, and metaphor (the technique perhaps most closely associated with poetry), but also through dramatic or novelistic devices such as monologue, narrative, and dialogue. It may ring upon our aural senses in the way that music does through onomatopoeia, rhythm, rhyme, assonance, or dissonance. It is freed, at least partially, from the constraints of syntax, and this very flexibility—the possibility that it may stretch syntax to breaking point—is perhaps its most powerful resource of all. Yet, with all these means of expression available to it, what we value most in a poem is not clarity. We prefer a poem to make us consider the world in a new light and to turn us "to those inner things which are to be grasped".[17] If, to begin with, a poem compels us to search carefully through its images and metaphors, to consider its allusions in all their possible implications, and to turn the ideas one way and then the other, it will also lead at last to understanding. This process of articulating the various strands of implication is, in itself, a form of meditation and a journey from darkness to light, similar to that involved in unravelling and penetrating to the meaning of a riddle.

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[17] Isidore of Seville, quoted in V. Law *Wisdom, Authority and Grammar in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge, 1995), 24.

Appendix A

Taxonomies in Symphosius' *Symphosii Scholastici Aenigmata*

Riddles	Lemma	Theme	Subject Group
100 Monumentum	-um		Culture artefacts
1 Graphium			Writing
2 Harundo			Writing
3 Anulus cum gemma	-a		Culture artefacts
4 Clavis	-is		
5 Catena	-a		Enclosure
6 Tegula	-la		Culture artefacts
7 Fumus			Meteorological Phenomena
8 Nebula	-la		Meteorological Phenomena
9 Pluvia			
10 Glacies			Water
11 Nix			Water
12 Flumen et Piscis	-is		
13 Navis		Dependence	
14 Pullus in ovo	-o		Non-Mammalian and/or Pest Animals
15 Vipera		Destructive Nourishment	
16 Tinea			
17 Aranea	-ea / -a		
18 Coclea			
19 Rana		Self-sufficency	
20 Testudo	-o		
21 Talpa			
22 Formica	-ca / -a		
23 Musca		Scavenging Pests	
24 Curculio	-lio		
25 Mus	-us		
26 Grus		Flying Creatures	
27 Cornix	-nix		
28 Vespertilio	-lio		
29 Ericius	-us		
30 Pediculus		Ancient Greek Narratives	
31 Phoenix	-nix		Mythic Creature
32 Taurus	-es/ us		Hybrid — Wild and Domesticated Animals
33 Lupus		Preditor	
34 Vulpes		Preditor	
35 Capra			Divinity
36 Porcus		Prey	
37 Mula			Parentage
38 Tigris	-ris/ rus		
39 Centaurus			Mythic Creature
40 Papaver	-ver/ va		Plants
41 Malva			
42 Beta	-ta		
43 Cucurbita			
44 Cepa			
45 Rosa	-a		flowers

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Entry					
46 Viola					
47 Tus				Incense	
48 Murra					
49 Ebur					
50 Fenum			Grain Cultivation	Cultivated	
51 Mola					
52 Farina				Nature	
53 Vitis					
54 Hamus				Sharp metal implements	
55 Acula					
56 Caliga	caliga-				Man-made Objects
57 Clavus caligaris					
58 Capillus	-pil-		Hair		
59 Pila					
60 Serra	-ra			Subdued Nature	
61 Ancora					
62 Pons	-pon-		Water		
63 Spongia					
64 Tridens					
65 Sagitta					
66 Flagellum					
67 Lanterna					
68 Specular	specul-			Containing the Ineffable	
69 Speculum					
70 Clepsydra					
71 Puteus	-us		Juxtaposition of two elements		
72 Tubus					
73 Follis	-is				
74 Lapis					
75 Calx	-x				Stone
76 Silex					
77 Rotae	-ae				Everyday Technology
78 Scalae		sc-			
79 Scopa					
80 Tintinnabulum					
81 Lagena					
82 Conditum				Wine	
83 Vinum in Acetum Conversum	-um				Foodstuffs
84 Malum		mal-			
85 Perna					
86 Malleus	-lleus/llus/ lis	mal-		Implements	Leisure and pleasure
87 Pistillus					
88 Strigilis Aenea					
89 Balneum					
90 Tessera					
91 Pecunia					
92 Mulier quae Geminos Pariebat			In extremity		Humans
93 Miles Podagricus	-us				
94 Luscus Alium Vendens					
95 Funambulus	-us				
96 De VIII Tollas VII et Remanet VI					
97 Umbra					
98 Echo			Death/ underworld		Simulacra
99 Somnus					
100 Monumentum	-um			Writing	Culture artefacts
1 Graphium					

Appendix B

Symphosius' Influence

Appendix C

The Texts

Aldhelm, De Creatura.

Conditor, aeternis fulcit qui saecla columnis,
Rector regnorum, frenans et fulmina lege,
Pendula dum patuli vertuntur culmina caeli,
Me varium fecit, primo dum conderet orbem.
Pervigil excubiis: numquam dormire iuvabit,
Sed tamen extemplo clauduntur lumina somno;
Nam Deus ut propria mundum dicione gubernat,
Sic ego complector sub caeli cardine cuncta.
Segnior est nullus, quondam me larbula ferret,
Setigero rursus constans audacior apro;
Nullus me superat cupiens vexilla triumphi
Ni Deus, aethrali summus qui regnat in arce.
Prorsus odorato ture flagrantior halans
Olfactum ambrosiae, necnon crescentia glebae
Lilia purpureis possum conexa rosetis
Vincere spirantis nardi dulcedine plena;
Nunc olida ceni squalentis sorde putresco.
Omnia, quaeque polo sunt subter et axe reguntur,
Dum pater arcitenens concessit, jure guberno;
Grossas et graciles rerum comprenso figuras.
Altior, en, caelo rimor secreta Tonantis
Et tamen inferior terris tetra Tartara cerno;
Nam senior mundo praecessi tempora prisca,
Ecce, tamen matris horno generabar ab alvo
Pulchrior auratis, dum fulget fibula, bullis,
Horridior ramnis et spretis vilior algis.
Latior, en, patulis terrarum finibus exto
Et tamen in media concludor parte pugilli,
Frigidior brumis necnon candente pruina,
Cum sim Vulcani flammis torrentibus ardens,
Dulcior in palato quam lenti nectaris haustus
Dirior et rursus quam glauca absinthia campi.
Mando capes mordax lurconum more Ciclopum,
Cum possim iugiter sine victu vivere felix.
Plus pernix aquilis, Zephiri velocior alis,
Necnon accipitre properantior, et tamen horrens
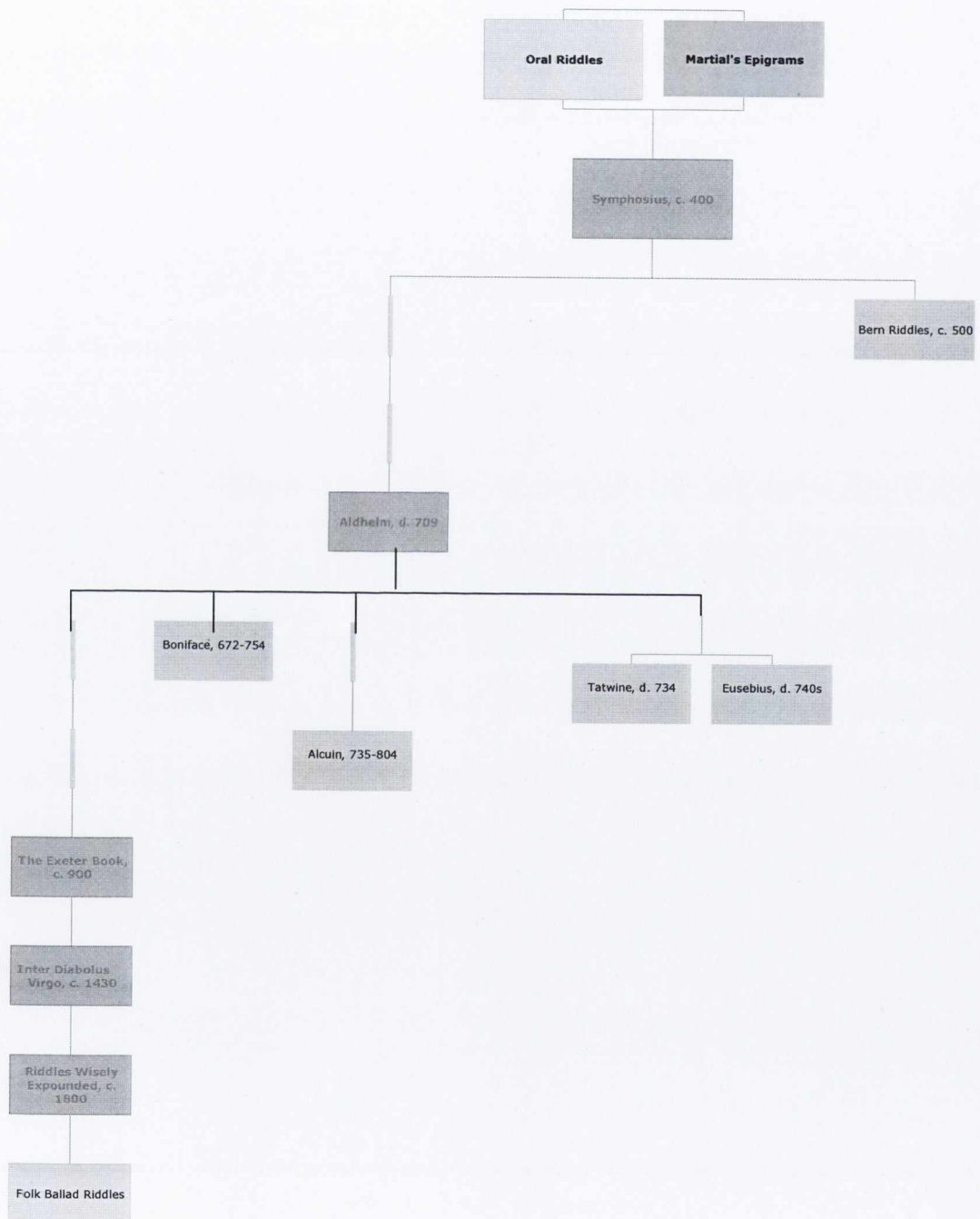Lumbricus et limax et tarda testudo palustris

Appendix A

Taxonomies in Symphosius' *Symphosii Scholastici Aenigmata*

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8 Nebula	-la				
9 Pluvia					
10 Glacies				Water	
11 Nix					
12 Flumen et Piscis	-is				Non-Mammalian and/or Pest Animals
13 Navis			Dependence		
14 Pullus in ovo		-o			
15 Vipera			Destructive Nourishment		
16 Tinea					
17 Aranea	-ea	-a			
18 Coclea			Self-sufficency		
19 Rana					
20 Testudo		-o			
21 Talpa					
22 Formica	-ca	-a			
23 Musca			Scavenging Pests		
24 Curculio	-lio				
25 Mus	-us				
26 Grus			Flying Creatures		
27 Cornix	-nix				
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46 Viola					
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88 Strigilis Aenea					
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90 Tessera					
91 Pecunia					
92 Mulier quae Geminos Pariebat					
93 Miles Podagricus	-us		In extremity		
94 Luscus Alium Vendens					Humans
95 Funambulus	-us				
96 De VIII Tollas VII et Remanet VI					
97 Umbra					
98 Echo			Death/ underworld		Simulacra
99 Somnus					
100 Monumentum	-um			Writing	Culture artefacts
1 Graphium					

Appendix B

Symphosius' Influence

Oral Riddles

Martial's Epigrams

Symphosius, c. 400

Bern Riddles, c. 500

Aldhelm, d. 709

Boniface, 672-754

Alcuin, 735-804

Tatwine, d. 734

Eusebius, d. 740s

The Exeter Book, c. 900

Inter Diabolus Virgo, c. 1430

Riddles Wisely Expounded, c. 1800

Folk Ballad Riddles

Appendix C

The Texts

Aldhelm, De Creatura.

Conditor, aeternis fulcit qui saecla columnis,
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Sed tamen extemplo clauduntur lumina somno;
Nam Deus ut propria mundum dicione gubernat,
Sic ego complector sub caeli cardine cuncta.
Segnior est nullus, quondam me larbula ferret,
Setigero rursus constans audacior apro;
Nullus me superat cupiens vexilla triumphi
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Lilia purpureis possum conexa rosetis
Vincere spirantis nardi dulcedine plena;
Nunc olida ceni squalentis sorde putresco.
Omnia, quaeque polo sunt subter et axe reguntur,
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Horridior ramnis et spretis vilior algis.
Latior, en, patulis terrarum finibus exto
Et tamen in media concludor parte pugilli,
Frigidior brumis necnon candente pruina,
Cum sim Vulcani flammis torrentibus ardens,
Dulcior in palato quam lenti nectaris haustus
Dirior et rursus quam glauca absinthia campi.
Mando capes mordax lurconum more Ciclopum,
Cum possim iugiter sine victu vivere felix.
Plus pernix aquilis, Zephiri velocior alis,
Necnon accipitre properantior, et tamen horrens
Lumbricus et limax et tarda testudo palustris

Atque, fimi soboles sordentis, cantarus ater
Me dicto citius vincunt certamine cursus.
Sum gravior plumbo: scopulorum pondera vergo;
Sum levior pluma, cedit cui tippula limphae;
Nam silici, densas quae fudit viscere flammas,
Durior aut ferro, tostis sed mollior extis.
Cincinnos capitis nam gesto cacumine nullos,
Ornent qui frontem pompis et tempora setis,
Cum mihi caesaries volitent de vertice crispae,
Plus calamistratis se comunt quae calamistro.
Pinguior, en, multo scrofarum axungia glesco,
Glandiferis iterum referunt dum corpora fagis
Atque saginata laetantur carne subulci;
Sed me dira famis macie torquebit egenam,
Pallida dum iugiter dapibus spoliabor opimis.
Limpida sum, fateor, Titanis clarior orbe,
Candidior nivibus, dum ningit vellera nimbus,
Carceris et multo tenebris obscurior atris
Atque latebrosis, ambit quas Tartarus, umbris.
Ut globus astrorum plasmor teres atque rotunda
Sperula seu pilae necnon et forma cristalli;
Et versa vice protendor ceu Serica pensa
In gracilem porrecta panum seu stamina pepli.
Senis, ecce, plagis, latus qua panditur orbis,
Ulterior multo tendor, mirabile fatu;
Infra me suprave nihil per saecula constat
Ni rerum genitor mundum sermone coercens.
Grandior in glaucis ballena fluctibus atra
Et minor exiguo, sulcat qui corpora, verme
Aut modico, Phoebi radiis qui vibrat, atomo;
Centenis pedibus gradior per gramina ruris
Et penitus numquam per terram pergo pedester.
Sic mea prudentes superat sapientia sofos,
Nec tamen in biblis docuit me littera dives
Aut umquam quivi, quid constet sillaba, nosse.
Siccior aestivo torrentis caumate solis,
Rore madens iterum plus uda flumine fontis;
Salsior et multo tumidi quam marmora ponti
Et gelidis terrae limphis insulsior erro,
Multiplici specie cunctorum compta colorum,
Ex quibus ornatur praesentis machina mundi,
Lurida cum toto nunc sim fraudata colore.
Auscultate mei credentes famine verbi,
Pandere quae poterit gnaws vix ore magister
Et tamen infitians non retur frivola lector!
Sciscitor inflatos, fungar quo nomine, sofos.

Exeter Book, Riddle 40

(Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501. Reprinted in B. Muir, ed.

Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry (Chicago, 2006), 316—20.)

Ece is se scyppend, se þas eorþan nu
wreðstuþum wealdeð ond þas world healdeð.
Rice is se reccend ond on ryht cyning
ealra anwalda, eorþan ond heofones,
healdeð ond wealdeð, swa he ymb þas utan hweorfeð.
He mec wrætlice worhte æt frymþe,
þa he þisne ymbhwyrft ærest sette,
heht mec wæccende wunian longe,
þæt ic ne slepe siþþan æfre,
ond mec semninga slæp ofergongeþ,
beoð eagan min ofestum betyned.
þisne middangeard meahtig dryhten
mid his onwalde æghwær styreð;
swa ic mid waldendes worde ealne
þisne ymbhwyrft utan ymbclyppe.
Ic eom to þon bleað, þæt mec bealdlice mæg
gearu gongende grima abregan,
ond eofore eom æghwær cenra,
þonne he gebolgen bidsteal giefeð;
ne mæg mec oferswiþan segnberendra
ænig ofer eorþan, nymþe se ana god
se þisne hean heofon healdeþ ond wealdeþ.
Ic eom on stence strengre micle
þonne ricels oþþe rose sy,
  on eorþan tyrf
wynlic weaxeð; ic eom wræstre þonne heo.
þeah þe lilie sy leof moncynne,
beorht on blostman, ic eom betre þonne heo;
swylce ic nardes stenc nyde oferswiþe
mid minre swetnesse symle æghwær,
ond ic fulre eom þonne þis fen swearte
þæt her yfle adelan stinceð.
Eal ic under heofones hwearfte recce,
swa me leof fæder lærde æt frymþe,
þæt ic þa mid ryhte reccan moste
þicce ond þynne; þinga gehwylces
onlicnesse æghwær healde.
Hyrre ic eom heofone, hateþ mec heahcyning
his deagol þing dyre bihealdan;
eac ic under eorþan eal sceawige

wom wraðscrafu   wraþra gæsta.
Ic eom micle yldra   þonne ymbhwyrft þes
oþþe þes middangeard   meahte geweorþan,
ond ic giestron wæs   geong acenned
mære to monnum   þurh minre modor hrif.
Ic eom fægerre   frætwum goldes,
þeah hit mon awerge   wirum utan;
ic eom wyrslicre   þonne þes wudu fula
oððe þis waroð   þe her aworpen ligeð.
Ic eorþan eom   æghwær brædre,
ond widgielra   þonne þes wong grena;
folm mec mæg bifon   ond fingras þry
utan eaþe   ealle ymbclyppan.
Heardra ic eom ond caldra   þonne se hearda forst,
hrim heorugrimma,   þonne he to hrusan cymeð;
ic eom Ulcanus   up irnendan
leohtan leoman   lege hatra.
Ic eom on goman   gena swetra
þonne þu beobread   blende mid hunige;
swylce ic eom wraþre   þonne wermod sy,
þe her on hyrstum   heasewe stondeþ.
Ic mesan mæg   meahtelicor
ond efnetan   ealdum þyrse,
ond ic gesælig mæg   symle lifgan
þeah ic ætes ne sy   æfre to feore.
Ic mæg fromlicor   fleogan þonne pernex
oþþe earn oþþe hafoc   æfre meahte;
nis zefferus,   se swifta wind,
þæt swa fromlice mæg   feran æghwær;
me is snægl swiftra,   snelra regnwyrm
ond fenyce   fore hreþre;
is þæs gores sunu   gonge hrædra,
þone we wifel   wordum nemnað.
Hefigere ic eom micle   þonne se hara stan
oþþe unlytel   leades clympre,
leohtre ic eom micle   þonne þes lytla wyrm
þe her on flode gæð   fotum dryge.
Flinte ic eom heardre   þe þis fyr drifeþ
of þissum strongan   style heardan,
hnescre ic eom micle   halsrefeþre,
seo her on winde   wæweð on lyfte.
Ic eorþan eom   æghwær brædre
ond widgelra   þonne þes wong grena;
ic uttor eaþe   eal ymbwinde,
wrætlice gewefen   wundorcræfte.
Nis under me   ænig oþer

wiht waldendre   on worldlife;
ic eom ufor   ealra gesceafta,
þara þe worhte   waldend user,
se mec ana mæg   ecan meahtum,
geþeon þrymme,   þæt ic onþunian ne sceal.
Mara ic eom ond strengra   þonne se micla hwæl,
se þe garsecges   grund bihealdeð
sweartan syne;   ic eom swiþre þonne he,
swylce ic eom on mægene   minum læsse
þonne se hondwyrm,   se þe hæleþa bearn,
secgas searoþoncle,   seaxe delfað.
Nu hafu ic in heafde   hwite loccas
wræste gewundne,   ac ic eom wide calu;
ne ic breaga ne bruna   brucan moste,
ac mec bescyrede   scyppend eallum;
nu me wrætlice   weaxað on heafde
þæt me on gescyldrum   scinan motan
ful wrætlice   wundne loccas.
Mara ic eom ond fættra   þonne amæsted swin,
bearg bellende,   þe on bocwuda,
won wrotende   wynnum lifde
þæt he

Exeter Book, Riddle 66

Ic eom mare   þonne þes middangeard
læsse þonne hondwyrm,   leohtre þonne mona,
swiftre þonne sunne.   Sæs me sind ealle
flodas on fæðmum   ond þes foldan bearm,
grene wongas.   Grundum ic hrine,
helle underhnige,   heofonas oferstige,
wuldres eþel,   wide ræce
ofer engla eard,   eorþan gefylle,
ealne middangeard   ond merestreamas
side mid me sylfum.   Saga hwæt ic hatte.

Exeter Book, Riddle 93

Smeþr[. . . . .]ad,

hyrre þonne heofon[. . . . .

. . . .]   glædre þonne sunne,

[. . . . .]style,

smeare þonne sealt ry[. . . . .]

leofre þonne þis leoht eall,   leohtre þon w[. . . .]

Inter Diabolus et Virgo (c.1430)

(Rawlinson MS. D. 328, fol. 174 b., Bodleian Library,

from a book acquired by Walter Pollard of Plymouth in 1444—5.

Reprinted in F. J. Child, ed. *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*

Wol ye here a wonder thynge
Betwyxt a mayd and the fovle fende?

Thys spake the fend to the mayd:
Beleue on me, mayd, to day.

Mayd, mote y thi leman be,
Wyssedom y wolle teche the:

All the wyssedom off the world,
Hyf thou wolt be true and forward holde

What ys hyer than ys [the] tre?
What ys dypper than ys the see?

What ys scharpper than ys the thorne?
What ys loder than ys the horne?

What [ys] longger than ys the way?
What is rader than ys the day?

What [ys] bether than is the bred?
What ys scharpper than ys the dede?

What ys grenner than ys the wode?
What ys sweetter than ys the note?

What ys swifter than ys the wynd?
What ys recher than ys the kynge?

What ys yeluer than ys the wex?
What [ys] softer than ys he flex?

But thou now answery me,
Thu schalt for sothe my leman be.

Ihesu, for thy myld mygth,
As thu art kynge and knygt,

Lene me wisdome to answere here rygth,
And schylde me fram the fovle wygth!

Hewene ys heyer than ys the tre,
Helle ys dypper than ys the see.

Hongyr ys scharpper than [ys] the thorne,
Thonder ys lodder than ys the horne.

Loukynge us longer than ys the way,
Syn is rader than ys the day.

Godys flesse ys betur than ys the brede,
Payne ys strenger than ys the dede.

Grass ys grenner than ys the wode.
Loue ys swetter than ys the notte.

Thowt ys swifter than ys the wynde,
Ihesus ys recher than ys the kynge.

Safer is yeluer than ys the wexs,
Selke ys softer than ys the flex.

Now, thu fende, style thu be;
Nelle ich speke no more with the!

Riddles Wisely Expounded, Version C

(Motherwell's MS., p. 647 from the singing of Mrs Storie. Reprinted in

F. J. Child *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (New York, 1882—98; 2003), 4—5.

There was a knicht riding frae the east,
Wha had been wooing at monie a place.

He came unto a widow's door,
And speird whare her three dochters were.

The auldest ane's to a washing gane,
The second's to a baking gane.

The youngest ane's to a wedding gane,
And it will be nicht or she be hame.

He sat him doun upon a stane,
Till thir three lasses came tripping hame.

The auldest ane's to the bed making,
And the second ane's to the sheet
spreading.

The youngest ane was bauld and bricht,
And she was to lye with this unco knicht.

'Gin ye will answer me questions ten,
The morn ye sall be made my ain.

'O what is heigher nor the tree?
And what is deeper nor the sea?

'Or what is heavier nor the lead?
And what is better nor the breid?

'O what is whiter nor the milk?
Or what is safter nor the silk?

'Or what is sharper nor a thorn?
Or what is louder nor a horn?

'Or what is greener nor the grass?
Or what is waur nor a woman was?'

'O heaven is higher nor the tree,
And hell is deeper nor the sea.

'O sin is heavier nor the lead,
The blessing's better nor the bread.

'The snaw is whiter nor the milk,
And the down is safter nor the silk.

'Hunger is sharper nor a thorn,
And shame is louder nor a horn.

'The pies are greener nor the grass,
And Clootie's waur nor a woman was.'

As sune as she the fiend did name,
He flew awa in a blazing flame.

Riddles Wisely Expounded, Version E

There was a lady in the West,
She had three daughters of the best.

There came a stranger to the gate,
And he three days and nights did wait.

The eldest daughter did ope the door,
The second set him on the floor.

The third daughter she brought a
chair,
And placed it that he might sit there.

'Now answer me these questions
three,
Or you shall surely be Old Nick's.

'Now answer me these questions nine,
Or you shall surely all be mine

'What is greener than the grass?
What is smoother than crystal glass?

What is louder than a horn?
What is sharper than a thorn?

'What is brighter than the light?
What is darker than the night?

'What is keener than an axe?
What is softer than melting wax?

'What is rounder than a ring?
'To you we thus our answers bring.

'Envy is greener than the grass,
Flattery smoother than crystal glass.

'Rumour is louder than a horn,
Hunger is sharper than a thorn.

'Truth is bright than the light,
Falsehood is darker than the night.

'Revenge is keener than an axe,
Love is softer than melting wax.

'The world is rounder than a ring,
To you we thus our answers bring.

'Thus you have our answers nine,
And we never shall be thine

Riddles Wisely Expounded, Version A

(Broadside in the Rawlinson collection, 4to, 566, fol. 193, published in *Pills to Purge Melancholy* (1719), 130. Reprinted in F. J. Child *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (New York, 1882—98; 2003), 7

There was a lady of the North Country,
Lay the bent to the bonny broom
And she had lovely daughters three.
Fa la la la, fa la la la ra re

There was knight of noble worth
Which also lived in the North.

The knight, of courage stout and brave,
A wife he did desire to have.

He knocked at the ladie's gate
One evening when it was late.

The eldest sister let him in,
And pin'd the door with a silver pin.

The second sister she made his bed,
And laid soft pillows under his head.

The youngest daughter that same night,
She went to bed to this young knight.

And in the morning, when it was day,
These words unto him she did say:

'Now you have had your will,' quoth she,
'I pray, sir knight, will you marry me?'

The young brave knight to her replyed,
'Thy suit, fair maid, shall not be deny'd.

'If thou canst answer me questions three,
This very day will I marry thee.'

'Kind sir, in love, O then,' quoth she,
'Tell me what your [three] questions be.'

'O what is longer than the way,
Or what is deeper than the sea?

'Or what is louder than the horn,
Or what is sharper than a thorn?

'Or what is greener than the grass,
Or what is worse then a woman was?'

'O love is longer than the way,
And hell is deeper than the sea.

'And thunder is louder than the horn,
And hunger is sharper than a thorn.

'And poyson is greener than the grass,
And the Devil is worse than woman was.'

When she these questions answered had,
The knight became exceeding glad.

And having [truly] try'd her wit,
He much commended her for it.

And after, as it is verifi'd,
He made of her his lovely bride.

So now, fair maidens all, adieu,
This song I dedicate to you.

I wish that you may constant prove
Vnto the man that you do love.

The Devil's Nine Questions

(Collected by A. Peel, sung by Mrs. Rill Martin, Virginia, 1922. Reprinted in
B. Bronson *Singing Traditions of Child's Popular Ballads* (Princeton, NJ., 1976), 7.)

If you don't answer my questions nine
  Sing ninety-nine and ninety,
I'll take you off to hell alive,
  And you are the weaver's bonny.

What is whiter than milk?
What is softer than silk?

Snow is whiter than milk,
Down is softer than silk,

What is louder than a horn?
What is sharper than a thorn?

Thunder's louder than a horn,
Death is sharper than a thorn,

What is higher than a tree?
What is deeper than the sea?

Heaven's higher than a tree,
And hell is deeper than the sea,

What is innocenter than a lamb?
What is worse than womankind?

A babe is innocenter than a lamb,
She devil's worse than womankind,

You have answered me questions nine,
You are God's, you're not my own

The Devil's Nine Questions

(Collected by A. and E. Lomax, sung by Mrs. Texas Gladden, Salem, 1941. Reprinted in
B. Bronson *Singing Traditions of Child's Popular Ballads* (Princeton, NJ., 1976), 7—8.)

Oh, you must answer my questions nine,
  Sing ninety-nine and ninety,
Or you're not God's, you're one of mine.
  And you are the weaver's bonny.

What is whiter than milk?
What is softer than silk?

Snow is whiter than milk,
Down is softer than silk

What is higher than a tree?
And what is deeper than the sea?

Heaven's higher than a tree,
And hell is deeper than the sea.

What is louder than a horn?
And What is sharper than a thorn?

Thunder's louder than a horn,
and Death is sharper than a thorn.

What's more innocent than a lamb?
And what is meaner than womankind?

A babe's more innocent than a lamb,
And the devil is meaner than womankind.

Oh you have answered my questions nine,
And you are God's you're none of mine.

Appendix D

From the Old Hebrew to King James: Translating "Riddle"

The following table is a survey of the use and translation of the word "riddle" in various versions of the Bible significant to the history of the Symphosian Riddle. These fall into two categories, ancient versions (the Septuagint and Jerome's Vulgate) and the English versions (the various, partial Anglo-Saxon Bible translations, Wycliffite Bible, and King James Version). In each passage the word which in each language most unambiguously means "riddle", the Greek *αἴνιγμα*, the Latin *enigma*, the Old English *rædel* or *rædelse*, Middle English *ridel* or *resoun* and of course the English *riddle* have been marked in bold and underlined. Those synonyms used instead of *riddle* are underlined but unbolded. Although neither Symphosius nor this thesis engage with the Jewish tradition, I have included the Hebrew root words as they are given in *Strong's Concordance* for ease of reference. This is an important point of comparison since, of the fifteen occasions upon which one or other of the Bible texts refer to riddles or riddling, fourteen belong to the Old Testament. The single instance in the New Testament is in 1 Corinthians and refers to a passage in the Old Testament (Num. 12:8). Interestingly, there is not a single example in which a term is uniformly translated as *riddle*, which, in itself suggests something of the complexity of the topic. The table does not include the only overt riddle contest in the Bible, Samson's riddle "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness" (Jud. 14:14). In the KJV, the word "riddle" is used eight times throughout the passage (making it unsuitable for inclusion within the table).

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