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**REORDBERENDRA GESYHTHE AND CHRISTIAN
MYSTERY: NARRATIVE FRAMES IN
*THE DREAM OF THE ROOD***

Virginia A. Chappell

The received view of *The Dream of the Rood* has been that it is a poem of great artistry about the crucifixion. Stanley Greenfield, for example, says the poem is "the finest expression of the Passion in Old English poetry,"¹ and others have suggested that it is the finest religious poem in English, old, middle, or modern. Internally, the focus of criticism has been on the art of the poem's language and structure, and externally, on historical facts and artifacts that may have provided direct or indirect sources. What the criticism for the most part has failed to do is make connections outward from the language and structure of the poem to its fullest cultural context.

To the modern eye, perhaps the most remarkable feature of the poem is its use of prosopopoeia, the Cross's narration and explication of its own history. A. S. Cook, the poem's early twentieth-century editor, commented that "it is the rood's sheer humanity which is the striking invention of the poet."² Much of the criticism in this century has been concerned with showing how the material of this striking invention is rooted in the poem's historical contexts—early church liturgy, Christological controversy, the heroic imagery of Anglo-Saxon poetry, and Latin rhetoric.³ Unfortunately, however, this kind of historical criticism, while undoubtedly valuable for the information it provides, can have the problematic effect of flattening the genius of the poem by dissolving its richness into that of its cultural background. It can become difficult to remember what the poet actually did in making the poem, how the poem itself works. In addition, the focus on the rood's narrative (and its scriptural sources) ignores the fact that the Cross's prosopopoeia is only part of the narrative structure of the poem and that the story of the crucifixion is not the story of the poem. Finally, the emphasis on all the cultural lines into the poem ignores the poem as poetic expression. The genre of poetry, to the best of our

knowledge then as now, is primarily one of outward communicative expression, even if to a private, meditative reader rather than to a meadhall full of celebrating thanes. To look at a work, by intention or by effect, only as a concentrated embodiment of cultural themes is to miss the poem itself.

The need, then, is to study the poem less as artifact and more as discourse, as language interacting with an audience.⁴ The original audience is not available to us, of course, nor are contemporary commentaries. But the poem is, and scrutiny of it against the ground of historical scholarship can reveal the dynamics of the narrative discourse at work. The purpose of this essay is to examine the poem from the vantage point of what modern linguistics calls pragmatics. The linguist Charles J. Fillmore defines the pragmatic approach to the description of discourse this way: "Pragmatics is concerned with the three-termed relation that unites (a) linguistic form [syntax] and (b) the communicative functions that these forms are capable of serving [semantics], with (c) the contexts or settings in which those linguistic forms can have those communicative functions."⁵ The insight that pragmatics has to offer beyond the work of historical criticism is that it seeks to describe the language of a poem in terms of its interaction with an audience.

A pragmatic context for *The Dream of the Rood* is suggested by John Fleming's work specifically linking the poem's spirituality with eighth century monastic practices.⁶ Basic to his argument is a shift in interpretation away from Christology and the crucifixion toward eschatology and the Cross itself as an instrument of salvation. Fleming sees the poem primarily as an expression of faith by the dreamer, a reading that carries an implicit notion of audience and didactic or meditative intent within the monastery. In this context, he understands the Cross's injunction to the dreamer, "Nu ic the hate . . . thaet thu thas gesyht the secge mannum (Now I command you . . . that you this vision tell to others)" (11.95-96), as an evangelical commission.⁷ Fleming sees the Cross's narrative and homily to the dreamer as an educational experience, and the poem as a whole as a statement of "the penitential submission by which, just as Christ has taken up the sins of men, men must take up the Cross of Christ." The lines that close the rood's exhortation to the dreamer become for Fleming the "ascetic theorem" for the poem:

ac thurh tha rode sceal rice gesecan
of eorthwege aeghwylc sawl,
seo the mid wealdende wunian thenceth.

(but through the rood shall the kingdom seek
 away from earthly ways every soul
 who with the Lord desires to dwell.) 11.119-121⁸

Accordingly, the dreamer's response to the Cross attains crucial aesthetic, doctrinal, and what I am calling pragmatic importance.⁹

The poem's fundamental structure of narration followed by commentary, an important principle of Augustinian rhetoric, itself suggests a didactic awareness of audience.¹⁰ Through the creation of the poem that it is telling in both narration and commentary, the persona carries out the Cross's command to the dreamer to bear witness of the vision to mankind. However, this archetypal propagandistic process, as Faith Patten terms it, occurs not just through the commentary, but by means of symbol and figure, "so that through the intellectual exertion necessary to discover it, the reader will be both more aware of its value and more convinced of its truth."¹¹

Furthermore, the play of the narrative structure itself against what can be understood as cultural givens helps the poet make his doctrinal point. Richard Payne, who views the poem in the larger context of Judgment narratives, argues that its originality lies in its manipulation of descriptive and iconographic convention to make a point.¹² Agreeing with Cook and other critics that the speaking Cross is the poet's striking invention, he focuses on the impact of that inventiveness within cultural conventions:

Our Old English author clearly expects his readers to react to his use of [eschatological iconography] conventions, and even assists them in reacting by providing the "touchstone" figure of the dreamer, whose initial reaction to the vision reflects the sort of mixture of awe, contrition, and fear that medieval writers typically associate with the assembled multitudes at Judgment.¹³

Payne discusses details of the dreamer's opening vision that the audience would have understood as eschatological: the appearance of the Cross in the midnight sky, the presence of "halige gastas, / men ofer moldan, ond eall theos maere gesceaft (holy spirits—angelic hosts, / men over the earth, and all this glorious creation)" (11.11b-12), and the fear that strikes the dreamer, who is "synnum fah (stained with or guilty of sin)."¹⁴

Expectations about the scene of the Last Judgment set up in the opening lines are soon broken, however. The conventions of Judgment narrative would lead the reader to expect the Judge. Instead, the poet substitutes

the Cross, primarily, Payne argues, as a symbol of the penitential path toward spiritual perfection. Like Fleming, but through a reading that depends more upon pragmatic effects, Payne interprets the poem as saying "that the penitential works of 'spiritual crucifixion' will act as an intercessor for man on the day of the Last Judgment."¹⁵ Salvation will come, as the Cross says, to those who seek the heavenly kingdom "thurh tha rode" (1.119a).

The concept of "per crucem ad lucem (through the cross to the light)," central to Christian doctrine, is clearly central to the poem. It is one of the many doctrinal mysteries writ large and small within it, most of them undoubtedly understood as givens by the poet and his audience: Christ's death and resurrection, Christ as God incarnate, the injunction of humans to take up the cross of the penitential life, Christ's overturning of "Adomes ealdgewyrhtum (Adam's old work or deed of old)" (1.100a), and the fact of Christ's triumph through sacrifice. Payne's analysis of the impact of the prosopopoeia suggests how the poet worked within cultural givens such as these. For a broader, more schematic view of these interactions, one can turn to Fillmore's concept of frame-scene analysis.¹⁶ His fundamental notion is that language creates frames—narrower systems of reference and expectation—within scenes—larger, perhaps prototypical, systems of reference and expectation (124). Fillmore says that he uses the term *scene* in "a maximally general sense, including not only visual scenes but also familiar kinds of interpersonal transactions, standard scenarios defined by the culture, . . . in general, any kind of coherent segment of human beliefs, actions, experiences, or imaginings" (124). Clearly, the expectations evoked by a conventional portrayal of the setting of the Last Judgment fit this larger conception of *scene*, as do the familiar images of Calvary, or the vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxon traditions of loyalty of a thane to his protector. The notion of scene, then, incorporates the idea behind Margaret Goldsmith's comment in regard to Christian themes in *Beowulf* that "the stored mind of the hearer or reader is part of the poet's material."¹⁷

Within a scene, Fillmore defines a *frame* as "any system of linguistic choices—the easiest cases being collections of words, but also including choices of grammatical rules or linguistic categories" (124). He says this kind of analysis is useful for "discussing the development, on the part of the interpreter, of an image or scene or picture of the world as that gets built up or filled out between the beginning and end of the text-interpretation experience" (125). The process of interpreting meaning begins as the first part of a text lays out a scene, or the outline of a scene,

a scene that necessarily has many blanks. As the hearer or reader proceeds, he or she "mentally creates a partially specified world"; as the text continues, the details get filled in, "and in the process, expectations get set up which later are fulfilled or thwarted. . . . What is important is that the ultimate nature of this text-internal world will often depend on aspects of scenes that are never identified explicitly in the text" (125).

Fillmore's attractively simple constructs go a long way toward opening this, or any, poem to a socio-historical critical perspective because frame-scene analysis leads to an understanding of how the many connections between the poem and its historical context actually operate within the discourse. Figure 1 uses the frame-scene idea to depict the interaction of cultural traditions and religious paradox in *The Dream of the Rood*. My intent is to show that the thematic paradoxes of the crucifixion itself ("per crucem ad lucem") are embodied in three different aspects of the discourse: the pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic. My argument is that the repeated incongruities—reversals, paradoxes, mysteries—in the interaction of these three kinds of linguistic experience enable the poem to embody as well as "onwreon wordum (reveal with words)" the central importance of the mystery of its text, the crucifixion. That mystery, of course, radiates beyond the historical event to what I follow Fleming and Payne in understanding to be the poem's "ascetic theorem": salvation "thurh tha rode."

In the diagram, the poem is set at the intersection of the two major cultural scenes understood to be at work in the poem. The upper left scene is the secular Anglo-Saxon *comitatus* tradition of valiant battle, unflinching loyalty, and generous gift-giving.¹⁸ The dotted lines are meant to imply permeability. The lower right scene represents Christian doctrine, which can be seen as overlaying and incorporating aspects of the pagan tradition. Its solid boundaries indicate Christianity's idea of itself as a defined body of doctrine. (Heresies might create bulges in the far corners.) The marking of two halves of this doctrinal scene specifies the mystery of Christ as God incarnate, without which the significance of the crucifixion is lost. At the intersection of the scenes, a frame is established, the linguistic system of the poem. Within that frame we have two others—first, the dreamer's narrative and commentary, and within it, the Cross's narrative and commentary. The arrows suggest the reader's movement through the poem from the dreamer's narrative to the Cross's, and from the narratives to the two layers of commentary. The path begins in the secular scene and emerges in the divine half of the Christian scene, paralleling the dreamer's movement from exile to community.¹⁹ It parallels as well the progression

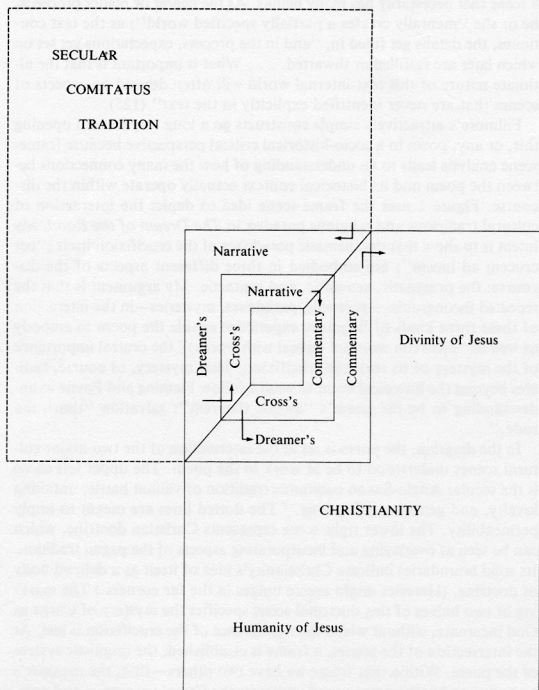


Fig. 1 Frame and Scene in *The Dream of the Rood*

of Christ from the Cross to his triumphant return to heaven at the poem's end. At the center is the crucifixion, represented as radiating outward. I take it to be the poem's essential text: the historical crucifixion event as recorded in the gospels. (Text is meant here in the sense of a scriptural passage that becomes the point of departure for a sermon/homily.) This analysis does not contradict Payne's and Fleming's readings of the poem's subject as the salvation through the Cross, but rather anchors that interpretation in the event that made salvation possible.

Indeed, the fundamental mystery of the agony and triumph of this event generates both the structure and the content of the poem. Paradoxical identifications and movements created by the narrative structure, by word play that links the poem's figures through parallels and reversals, and by syntactic patterns of parallel and chiasmus all make the poem itself turn and return like the Cross in lines 22–23: “hwilum hit waes mid waetan bestemed, / . . . Hwilum mid since gegyrwed (at times it was with wetness [blood] suffused, / . . . At times with treasure adorned).”²⁰

A peculiar kind of openness in the text results. Although the poem's doctrinal implications are not indeterminate, the reader's experience of the words on the page is one of ambiguity and paradox. Instead of undercutting these implications, however, the openness enhances them in a way not possible in a homiletic mode. A major source of the indeterminacy is the pragmatic premise of the poem: it is presented as a report of a dream vision. Seeing through the physicality of an object to concrete images of its abstract significance happens only in dreams. Constance Hieatt, who compares the poem to later medieval manifestations of the dream vision genre, explains that the “word-play and the underlying processes of ‘condensation’—blending, fusion, and double-meaning—are . . . characteristics of real dreams which were frequently used for artistic purposes in the genre.”²¹

The most sustained dream-like feature of the poem is the prosopopoeia of the Cross, which is particularly dream-like in the way that its very unnaturalness disappears. Part of the Cross's oneiric quality is its function as what J. A. Burrow calls a double persona with two very different forms—a tree “aheawen holtes on ende (hewn at the forest's edge)” (1.29) and the “sigebeam (wood of victory)” (1.13). This doubleness expands as the Cross becomes surrogate for both dreamer and Christ in the crucifixion narrative, and then the doubleness is what allows for grace in the commentary sections.²² As a narrative frame within the dreamer's frame, the Cross's speech has the effect of drawing the reader into an explicit face-to-face conversational interaction for which the dreamer is a surrogate.

The reader is drawn through the dreamer's narrative and led to the edge of the Cross's frame, "thaer licgende lange hwile (there lying a long while)" (1.24) like the dreamer, *behealdan* (to behold). As the Cross speaks, the dreamer's frame temporarily disappears so that by line 78, when the Cross addresses the dreamer—"Nu thu miht gehyran, haeleth min se leofa (Now you might understand, my beloved hero)"—the *you* has the impact of a direct address to the reader at the same time that it re-establishes the dreamer's presence. The double frame has an opposite effect as well. When the dreamer begins to speak again at line 122, the reinstated frame dramatizes the dreamer's own stance, thus setting him in relief as a persona. This final commentary section provides the culmination of the dreamer's crucial role as intermediary throughout the poem, bridging the gap between Christ and man as well as specifying it.²³

Within the narrative frames, semantic links involve the reader in the patterns of identification between dreamer and Cross, and then through the Cross's narration, between the Cross and Christ.²⁴ The dreamer is linked with Christ in several places by explicit semantic echoes, but the connections between the two are primarily by analogy through the Cross. Art recapitulates doctrine. Through these connections, largely to the extent that an identification between reader and dreamer builds, a connection becomes possible between Christ and audience. Aside from the specific links, the reader may also identify with, imaginatively take up the stance of, any of the various references to the rest of mankind: the speechbearers at rest in line three, the worshippers of the Cross in lines 82 and 86, "wifa cunn (womankind)" over whom Mary is honored in line 94, or the various references in the commentary sections to the sinfulness of mankind and to those who would seek the heavenly kingdom. Perhaps most directly the reader would connect with "mannum (mankind, people, or 'others')" in line 96, to whom the dreamer is enjoined to tell the story of his vision and to whom he has spoken in the opening "Hwaet (Lo)!"

Hieatt finds five direct semantic ties between the dreamer and Christ, which are presented in Figure 2. The isolation of the words on the chart belies the density they create in the poem. The variations on the root *wreon* (cover) are the first of these five echoes to become evident. The repetition from lines 17a to 53a establishes one of several paradoxical links between the Cross and Christ, then the negation of *wreon/bewreon* (to cover or clothe) in *onwreon* (to unwrap, reveal) at line 97a involves the dreamer in the pattern. The first use of *bewrigene* refers to the honoring of the Cross. Part of the pattern of past participles in the dreamer's opening description of the Cross, the word describes the gems worthily covering it. The

Rood	Christ	Dreamer
17a bewrigene	53a bewrigen	97a onwreoh
	39a haeleth	78b, 95b haeleth
60a eathmod elne mycle	34a elne mycle	122b-123b blithe mode, elne mycle
	69b maete weorode	124a maete werede
	152a gasta weorode	
	104b secan	127b secan

Fig. 2 Semantic Echoes among Rood, Christ, and Dreamer²⁵

second use of the verb, again as past participle, is during the mourning that follows the crucifixion. Christ's *hraew* (corpse) is covered with dark clouds. The third appearance of the root, now in its opposite form—*unwrap*—is in the poem's self-reflexive passage (11.95-100), in which the Cross orders the dreamer to uncover with words not just his vision but its doctrinal implications vis-à-vis the Cross. Lines 97-100 vary the imperative and its object in line 96:

Nu ic the hate, haeleth min se leofa,
thaet thu thas gesyhte secge mannum,
onwreoh wordum thaet hit is wuldres beam,
se the aelmihtig god on throwode
for mancynnes manegum synnum
ond Adomes ealdegewyrhtum.

(Now I command you, my beloved hero,
that you this vision tell to others,
unwrap with words that this is the tree of heaven
which almighty God suffered on
for mankind's many sins
and Adam's deed of old.)

Haeleth repeats the poem's first direct tie between the dreamer and Christ at line 78, where the Cross first explicitly addresses its audience. The word repeats the term the Cross uses for Christ as he readies himself for the crucifixion: "Ongyrede hine tha geong haeleth, thaet was god aelmihtig (ungirds himself that young hero, that was God almighty)" (1.39). The cohesive effect of *ongyrede* in line 39 is similar to that of *onwreoh* in

line 97 in that it reverses the signified meaning of the verb it echoes. In both cases, the unprefixing form has been used to describe the triumphant Cross in the opening vision (11.17–18, 23). *Gyredon* (gird) occurs again as the Cross describes itself after the Invention (1.77a), just before it first calls the dreamer *haeleth*. These parallel patterns of lexical cohesion through a negative prefix (the only instances of reversal through the *on*-prefix in the poem), supplemented by their further connection through *haeleth*, which is the more direct link between the dreamer and Christ, create a much denser pattern than the forms of *wreon* alone would. The effect adds to the structural pattern of reversals in the poem and to the building doctrinal statement. Through words that have been used to dramatize the crucifixion as triumph and sacrifice, Christ's willingness to ungird himself for the crucifixion is drawn into parallel with the dreamer/believer's willingness to preach.²⁶

The other instances of linkage through repetition or echo indicated in Figure 2 fit the same doctrinal scene (in Fillmore's sense). The plays on *elne mycle* (great zeal or strength), linking the three major figures as the *wreon* echoes do, all imply a humility that will lead to triumph. Christ hastens toward his sacrifice "elne mycle" (1.34a). The Cross at last can bow, "eathmod elne mycle (humble-hearted with great zeal)" (1.60a), to yield Christ's body to his eager thanes (Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus). The dreamer opens his commentary section by reporting that he prayed "blithe mode, elne mycle (joyful hearted, with great zeal)" to the Cross (11.122b–123a), just as "menn ofer moldan, ond ealle theos maere gesceaft / gebiddath him to thyssum beacne (men over the earth, and all this glorious creation / worships him at this sign)" (11.82a–83), a passage that itself repeats a line from the opening vision. The later echo of *gebiddath* at line 122 is significant as another instance of the dreamer (who may be understood as surrogate for the reader) doing as the Cross has told him, although indirectly in this case.

The opening lines of the dreamer's commentary draw another analogy between Christ and him when the dreamer describes himself praying alone, with "maete werede (small company)." The phrase, which constitutes all of line 124a, is striking in its stark repetition of the litotes at line 69b, when the "fuse (eager ones, i.e., Christ's followers)" have left the hill and Christ is alone in the tomb. For Christ, the situation is temporary; it is explicitly reversed in the poem's closing lines, where he returns to heaven triumphant, with "gasta weorode (spiritual company)" (1.152).²⁷ For the dreamer, salvation through the Cross, the hope of his life, may make the situation temporary.

Finally, the repeated occurrences of *secan* link the dreamer and Christ in two ways. In line 104b, the Cross tells how Christ will return to earth on Judgment Day “mancynn *secan* (to seek mankind).” Implicitly included in the object are both the dreamer and the reader. In line 127b the dreamer speaks of his hope “thaet ic thone *sigebeam secan mote* / . . . well weorthian (that I then the Cross of victory may seek/ . . . to worship fully)” (11.127, 129a). The seeking of the Cross as an analogy to the seeking of the heavenly kingdom is drawn yet more fully when the dreamer describes his friends as having “gewiton of worulde dreamum, sohton him wuldres cyning (departed from the world’s dream, sought the king of glory)” (1.133). Both of these last two mentions play off a variant of the verb *gesecan* (usually glossed as “attain”), in the all important doctrinal injunction at the end of the Cross’s commentary (1.119), and it, in turn, reverberates by reversing the seeker and sought of the Judgment Day reference in line 104.

These patterns of concentric framing, parallelism, and inversion are a fundamental product of the poem’s syntactic form as well. The syntax of the opening narration establishes oscillating echoes and contradictions even before the dream-like “hwilum . . . hwilum” parallel at lines 22–23 makes the mystery explicit. The poem’s first contrasts are established as the dreamer announces his intentions: he will tell the best of dreams (“swefna cyst”) which he saw alone, while the rest of earth’s speechbearers were asleep. Soon he himself will fall silent and the story of the poem will be borne by an unnatural speechbearer. From here the syntax creates frames within frames with repeated patterns of inversion within and between them.²⁸

After the initial announcement, the events of the narrator’s report are laid out within three syntactic frames established by *ic* (I) + *geseon* (to see). In line 4 the verb takes past subjunctive in the noun clause dependent on the impersonal form, *thuhte* (it seemed); in lines 14 and 21 the preterite occurs in independent clauses. The first *geseon* frame begins and ends with descriptions of the Cross (11. 4–9a and 13–14a).²⁹ The first and last clause of the frame have the subject *ic*, and the second reverses the movement of the first by setting the dreamer/sinner’s guilt in contrast to the *sigebeam*. The chiasmic syntax of that sentence embodies the contradiction: “syllic waes se *sigebeam*, ond ic synnum fah, / forwunded mid wommum (wondrous was the Cross of victory, and I with sin stained / wounded with iniquity).” The first clause begins with the predicate; the second turns the subject around from the *sigebeam* to *ic* and proceeds outward to a new predicate that not only reverses the glory of the Cross but also spells out

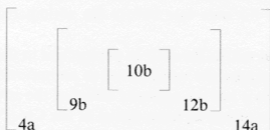
a content that is synecdochically responsible for the Cross's (Christ's) agony. This contrast also suggests the unworthiness and fear that were conventionally associated visually and verbally with Judgment Day scenes.³⁰ The agony will become explicit in the next *geseon* frame, but it is already implicit in the cultural scenes that the reader recognizes as early as the poem's second sentence, when the Cross is seen stretched against the midnight sky. Another reversal occurs with the past participle *forwunded*, which grammatically echoes the past participle adjectives in lines 5b and 7a, but now describes pain, not glory. This reversal becomes a paradox that governs the poem in many forms. Here it moves from triumph to degradation, emphasizing the separateness of man and Cross. Within the Cross's narrative it will move back to glory again, and as the commentaries progress, the dreamer will move toward an explicit hope of grace and unity with Christ.

Between these descriptive sentences lies another frame of perception, established by the two uses of *beheoldon* (behold) in lines 9b and 11a. The subject of the 9b verb is an irresolvable crux, it being impossible to determine whether (all the) angel(s) of the Lord beheld the Cross or whether all (creation, as elaborated in the subjects of the next *beheoldon*) beheld there the *engel*, which is either Christ or the Cross, if *engel* is glossed as messenger.³¹ Given the poem's carefully wrought narrative structure, my own preference, despite metrical problems, is to follow W. F. Bolton's and Micheal Swanton's readings of *engel* (the MS form) as an accusative masculine singular, "messenger," referring to the Cross.³² The line thus announces the doctrinal sense of the poem, prefigures the narrative role of the Cross in the poem, and serves as a foil for the ambiguous negation in line 10b—"ne waes thaer huru fracodes gealga (nor was there [it] certainly a criminal's gallows)." This striking break in the development of the descriptive discourse up to this point stands at the structural center of the first *geseon* frame and bespeaks both the doctrinal and perceptual mysteries of the poem. Given Payne's analysis of the unconventionality of substituting the Cross for the Judge, the line can be seen as key in making that shift. In the context of the fear and sinfulness of the eschatological scene, the *fracod* (an adjective used substantively) may even provoke identification from the audience. Swanton's analysis of line 10b indicates the importance of its ambiguity in relation to the presuppositions that one might be intended to infer:

The exact character of this denial is equivocal. If it is not a criminal's gallows, is it then the gallows of a righteous man? Or is it a gallows at all? The resolution and anticipation are

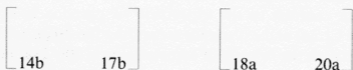
plain. Clearly both are true. It is at once the long-shunned instrument of squalid and humiliating death, and also the splendid emblem of victorious and everlasting life. This enigmatic statement therefore contains the essential paradox inherent in the cross, as in the person of Christ himself, and anticipates, verbally, the physical ambivalence of the constantly mutable emblem itself, soon to be seen changing its physical appearance together with its significance.³³

A diagram of the syntactic relationships of lines 4–14a shows frames within frames like this:



Although the weight of the words and the length of the lines makes the diagram less than precise in its balance, the concentric pattern of the syntax is significant in the way it parallels the narrative/commentary structure established by the poem's two speakers. Similarly, the poem's climactic line 56b—"Christ waes on rode (Christ was on the Cross)"—comes at a point in the center of the Cross's narration that is analogous to 10b's position in this set. Line 56b dramatizes the mystery that 10b augurs.³⁴

The syntactic patterns of the dreamer's remaining two *geseon* frames elaborate the chiasmus of line 13. The *geseah ic* kernel at 14b develops into a tight pattern of varying verbal phrases describing the glorious, worshipped Cross. The adversative *hwaethre* (however) marks a shift to a new verb of perception, *ongytan* (to perceive), and with it a new vision of the Cross (new in the language of the poem, but certainly a given at the level of scene). The importance of the reversal is reflected in the relationship among the sentences. The new verb of perception occurs not as a frame within a frame, but as an alternative, succeeding frame established by the same speaker. A diagram of this *geseon* chunk looks like this:



The dreamer's perception of *earmra aergewin* (ancient struggles of the wretched)³⁵ evokes images of previous execution on the denied *fracodes gealga* as well as of the Fall, which ties the dreamer's *synnum* and *wom-mum* to that of the race. This group of lines is framed like the previous one by a statement of the narrator's emotional state (ll. 20b–21a), a pattern repeated many times by the Cross itself. This time the emotionally expressive clauses reverse subject-verb order, like those that closed the previous chunk, but do not invert content. The juxtaposed syntactic complements express the dreamer's response to both the suffering perceived in the vision and the sense of his own guilt. The ambiguity of his explanation for his fear—"for thaere faegran gesyhthe (because of that fair sight)" (1.21a)—can be understood both as empathy for the torment he sees and as fear of his own fate before the anticipated Judgment Day tribunal.

The *hwaethre* that marks the shift in perspective in these lines deserves further comment because the word serves as an important connective in the poem. In line 18a it has the opposite effect of the adversative *ac* (but) in 11b. *Ac*'s contrast moves us from denial of the Cross's secular/human context to assertion of its glory. The scene is reversed again in the chiasmus of line 13, examined above, where the simple connective *ond* (and) serves as an unanticipated adversative. *Hwaethre* in line 18 then serves the same contrastive function as *ond* does in the seven lines that elaborate that initial statement of separation and suffering. Bolton shows how each instance of *hwaethre* in the poem can be understood as adversative, if not in the immediate syntax then in the larger narrative and doctrinal frames. Even if the word appears at first only to be furthering the narrative by making a bridge, as in line 24, the contrast always echoes this initial contrast in line 18 between degradation and glory, between earthly impulse and spiritual duty. Bolton sees this as part of an exhortation similar to that of *The Seafarer*—do not heed the call of the world but follow the path to salvation and home (*ham* in *The Seafarer*, *ethel* in *Dream*).³⁶

The hypometric lines of the final set of *geseon* clauses, which move back again from agony to glory, portray the enormous mystery of the vision with simple syntax, each phrase contained within its own half-line. The simplicity of structure of course belies the complexity of content. The synonymous pairing of *waedum* and *bleom* (dress and color) and of *bestemed* and *beswyled* (suffused and drenched), along with the repetition of *hwilum*, stands in contrast to the expression of paradox in both content (regarding the Cross) and experience (regarding the dreamer). The syntax of 22b–23a parallels the reversal of complements in 20b–21a, but in a more

condensed form. Here, instead of the subject and verb being repeated, the *mid* (with) prepositional phrase-participle sequence is reversed. At the same time that the narrative has moved from a conventional announcement of purpose to an evocation of an astonishing experience, its syntax has become tighter and simpler.

This analysis of the passage in terms of the perceptual frames established by *geseon* should not camouflage other important structural lexical parallels that overlay those frames. The hypometric lines at lines 9–10 and 20–23, for example, break the passage in two, again putting emphasis on the ambiguity of line 10b, whose analog in the second set, 23b, elaborates the idea of triumph. In this schema the *ac* of line 11a takes on more prominence, and the *hwaedre* of 18a more clearly echoes it. Another kind of frame is established by the syntactic parallels of 6b–7a and 20b:

Eall thaet beacen waes	
begotten mid golde.	6b–7a
Eall ic waes mid sorgum gedrefed	20b
(That beacon was	
all covered with gold.	
Completely I was with sorrow distressed.)	

These clauses, which again express the two sides of the Cross and the crucifixion, set off the main descriptive section of the passage, with two *geseon* clauses falling on either side and one near the middle. In addition, the fact of syntactic echo adds prominence to the repeated use of past participle modifiers and to the phonological and semantic echoes among them. The series of syntactic sames and semantic opposites develops this way: “begoten mid golde (all covered with gold), . . . forwunded mid wommum (wounded with iniquity), . . . gegyred mid golde (adorned with gold), . . . bewrigene weorthlice (clothed magnificently), . . . mid sorgum gedrefed (with sorrow distressed), . . . mid waetan bestemed (with wetness [blood] suffused), . . . beswyled mid swates gange (drenched with the flow of blood), . . . mid since gegyrwed (with treasure adorned).” It begins and ends with the glory of the Cross and all that it represents, but that glory comes only through descent into agony.

The remaining lines of the dreamer’s speech in the opening section serve to set him, and his audience, in an explicit position of witness to the Cross. When the dreamer speaks again, ninety-nine lines later, the syntax is quite different, and to many modern readers, less exciting poetically. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the poet’s purpose is not to dramatize mysteries but

Finally, then, analysis of the poem's structural framework at the three levels of pragmatics, semantics, and syntax illustrates how the artist played against the expectations of the prevalent cultural scenes and constructed frames within them to reinforce and break expectations at all three linguistic levels. The result embodies the doctrinal notion of salvation through the Cross and recapitulates the dream of mystery and the hope of salvation. The art of the text, while creating an aesthetic expression of indeterminacy, in the end underscores a didactic purpose.

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NOTES

1. Stanley Greenfield, *A Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York, 1965), 136. The Old English words in the title are my translation of the phrase, "The Vision of the Speechbearer."

2. A. S. Cook, ed., *The Dream of the Rood* (Oxford, 1905), liv.

3. For essays concerned with these issues see, for example, respectively, Howard R. Patch, "Liturgical Influence in *The Dream of the Rood*," *PMLA* 24 (1919): 233-57; Rosemary Woolf, "Doctrinal Influences on *The Dream of the Rood*," *Medium AEvum* 27 (1958): 137-53; Carol Jean Wolf, "Christ as Hero in *The Dream of the Rood*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 71 (1970): 202-10; and Margaret Schlauch, "The *Dream of the Rood* as Prosopopoeia," in *Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown* (New York, 1940), 23-24. Part of Schlauch's point is that the poet's use of prosopopoeia could have been rooted in contemporarily available Latin texts and thus was not as innovative as Cook took it to be.

4. The notion of linguistic interchange is implicit in the word *discourse*. It comes from the late Latin *discursus*, conversation, from the past participle of *discurrere*, to run back and forth.

5. Charles J. Fillmore, "Pragmatics and the Description of Discourse," in *Pragmatics II*, ed. Siegfried Schmidt (Munich, 1976); rpt. in *Radical Pragmatics*, ed. Peter Cole (New York, 1981), 144.

6. John Fleming, "The Dream of the Rood and Anglo-Saxon Monasticism," *Traditio* 22 (1966): 43-44.

7. Unless specifically noted, all Anglo Saxon quotations of the poem are from the text edited by George Philip Krapp, *The Vercelli Book*, Vol. II of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (New York, 1932), 61-65. The modern English translations are my own. I have kept them literal (and thus choppy in many places) to reveal the original word order and syntax. For smoother modern English versions of the poem the reader may consult Bernard Huppé's poetic translation in *The Web of Words* (Albany, 1970), 64-73, and E. Talbot Donaldson's prose translation in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 5th ed., ed. M. H. Abrams et al. (New York, 1986), vol. 1, 22-25. Typesetting constraints have necessitated rendering the old English thorn and edh as *th*, and separating the *ae* digraph.

8. Fleming, "Rood and Monasticism," 58, 60, 61.

9. Fleming's perspective contrasts markedly with that of many critics before him who saw the second half of the poem (after the Cross's story finishes at line 77) as a likely emendation by another poet, or as at least decidedly inferior to the first half. For the first view see, for example, Rosemary Woolf, "Doctrinal Influences," 153, and for the second, Bruce Dickins and Alan S. C. Ross, eds., *The Dream of the Rood* (1934, reprint, New York, 1966), 18.

10. N. A. Lee, who makes a convincing argument for viewing the poem as a unified piece, provides a valuable footnote from Augustine's *De catechizandis rudibus*, cap. iii-vii, regarding this technique. The following is from the opening remarks of cap. vii:

At the conclusion of the narration we should make known to [the pupil] the hope in the resurrection, and . . . combat by discussion the vain scoffings of unbelievers about the resurrection of the body, and speak to him of the last judgement to come, with its goodness to the good, its severity towards the wicked, . . . [then] we should describe with eager longing the kingdom of the good and faithful, and that city in heaven with its joys.

St. Augustine, *The First Catechetical Instruction*, trans. J. P. Christopher, Vol. II of *Ancient Christian Writers* (London, 1946), 27-28. Quoted by N. A. Lee, "The Unity of *The Dream of the Rood*," *Neophilologus* 56 (1972): 483. Like Fleming, Lee reads the poem as being primarily about the Cross as an instrument of salvation. His argument for the poem's unity is based on documentation of extensive liturgical and iconographic echoes that he contends must have been salient and coherent to the poem's contemporary audience.

11. Faith Patten, "Structure and Meaning in *The Dream of the Rood*," *English Studies* 49 (1968): 401.

12. Richard Payne, "Convention and Originality in the Vision Framework of *The Dream of the Rood*," *Modern Philology* 73 (1976): 329-341.

13. *Ibid.*, 336.

14. *Ibid.*, 334. Payne probably overstates the case when he calls lines 13 ff. the thematic core of the poem in reference to an eschatological locus since the Cross's later description of itself contains many lexical and syntactic echoes of these lines in direct reference to its experience at the crucifixion.

15. *Ibid.*, 339.

16. Charles J. Fillmore, "An Alternative to Checklist Theories of Meaning," *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (Berkeley, 1975), 123-31. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

17. Margaret Goldsmith, "The Christian Perspective in *Beowulf*," *Comparative Literature* 14 (1962): 75.

18. Carol Jean Wolf analyzes the poem's images from this tradition in detail in "Christ as Hero," and John Gardner provides a thorough discussion of how the traditional heroic values are inverted into conformity with Christian doctrine in *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English* (Carbondale, Illinois, 1975), 103-106.

19. Cf. Fleming, "Rood and Monasticism," *passim*. The dreamer is alone at the poem's opening, speaks of his former "langunghwila (time of longing, or of weariness of spirit)" at the beginning of his commentary (l.126a), and describes how he looks forward to the time when the Cross will bring him to "thaer is dryhtnes folc / geseted to symle (where [are] the lord's people / set at a feast)" (ll.140b-141a). N. A. Lee finds evidence in lines 126b-131a of the dreamer's experience having precipitated his conversion in "Unity of Rood," 470.

20. Here I follow Dickins and Ross, *Rood*, 20, 24, who retain the manuscript's small capital on *Hwilum* in line 23b but use commas at the end of 22b and 23a nevertheless. Their point is that the small capitals are usually followed by a clause expressing sharp contrast.

21. Constance Hieatt, "Dream Frame and Verbal Echo in the *Dream of the Rood*," *Neophilologische Mitteilungen* 72 (1971): 251. Hieatt provides extensive charts of verbal parallels among the chief figures of the poem and among the structural layers of commentary and narrative. She takes the term "condensation" from J. A. Burrow, "An Approach to *The Dream of the Rood*," *Neophilologus* 43 (1959): 123-33.

22. Burrow, "An Approach," 257, 259, et *passim*.

23. Neil D. Isaacs argues that the poem's structure is one of progressive identifications from audience to artist, to dreamer, to Cross, to Christ in "Progressive Identifications: The Structural Principal of *The Dream of the Rood*," in *Structural Principles in Old English Poetry* (Knoxville, Tennessee, 1968), 3-18. He differs on this point with Burrow, "An Approach," who sees a movement for the dreamer from fear and sorrow to hope, but not to unity with Christ.

24. A number of critics have written about these connections. In addition to Hieatt, "Dream Fame and Verbal Echo," the most helpful are Eugene R. Kintgen, who closely examines the poem's semantic patterns in "Echoic Repetition in Old English Poetry," *Neophilologische Mitteilungen* 75 (1974): 202-23 and Faith

Patten, who analyzes the pattern of identification in terms of structure in "Structure and Meaning."

25. Taken from Hieatt, "Dream Frame and Verbal Echo," 256. I have reversed her order on the second and third echoes to fit my discussion.

26. The other two instances of verbs used with the *on-* prefix are not negation pairs. Interestingly, both are connected directly to the poem's paradoxical "ascetic theorem." They are *lysan* (l. 41) and *onlysan* (l. 147), "redeem," both referring to the sacrifice of the crucifixion, and *byrigan* (l. 101) and *onbyrigan* (l. 114), "taste." The first instance of *byrigan* refers to the sacrifice of Christ's death (and links him with Adam), and the second refers to Christ's search for whoever would taste death—take up the Cross—as he did (a tie between Christ and "the rest of mankind" that Hieatt overlooks). Louis H. Leiter discusses in some detail several semantic links among the three main figures and Adam in "The Dream of the Rood: Patterns of Transformation," in *Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*, ed. Robert P. Creed (Providence, Rhode Island, 1967), 97ff.

27. See Dickins and Ross, *Rood*, 35, regarding the punctuation of line 151. With a comma at the end of 151, *sidthfate* (journey) in 150b is understood to refer to Christ's return to heaven (Krapp's reading). With a period (their reading), the word is understood to refer to the Harrowing of Hell.

28. Huppé, *Web of Words*, 88. He points out that the narrative action is always advanced through third person sentence structure, but that a reflective or expressive first person frame always surrounds it. The pattern reflects the larger rhetorical one of narrative and commentary in its balance of distant observing and immediate, even intimate, expressing.

29. Krapp's indentation of line 13 is distracting. Huppé makes the frames easier to see on the page by dropping lines 14b and 21b down two spaces, creating paragraph shapes in *The Web of Words*, 64.

30. Cf. Payne, "Convention and Originality."

31. See Frederic G. Cassidy and Richard N. Ringler, *Bright's Old English Grammar and Reader*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1971), 311.

32. W. F. Bolton, "Connectives in *The Seafarer* and *The Dream of the Rood*," *Modern Philology* 57 (1959-60): 260-62; Michael Swanton, "Ambiguity and Anticipation in *The Dream of the Rood*," *Neophilologische Mitteilungen* 70 (1969): 421.

33. Swanton, "Ambiguity and Anticipation," 419.

34. For an analysis of the poem from the numerist perspective, see David R. Howlett, "The Structure of *The Dream of the Rood*" *Studia Neophilologia* 48 (1976): 301-6.

35. See Cook, *Dream of Rood*, Dickins and Ross, *Rood*, Cassidy and Ringler, *Bright's Grammar*, regarding this translation.

36. Bolton, "Connectives," 260-62.