Summary. Starting with a discussion about the standard approach to the \textit{Heliand} – an early ninth-century Old Saxon verse reworking of the Gospel – as provided by Ronald Murphy in 1989 and 1992, this paper seeks to find out a new path for the interpretation of the poem as far as its communicative features are concerned. In order to do so, a linguistic and philological analysis of how the \textit{Heliand} authors re-wrote their direct and indirect hypotexts will be carried out, paying particular attention to the information structure of the utterances. Furthermore, the context from which the poem springs – i.e., broadly speaking, the so-called “Carolingian culture and thought” – will be taken into consideration in order to account for the communicative choices made by the compilers. Finally, it will be argued that the \textit{Heliand} conveys an orthodox Christian message, whose presence throughout the whole poem has led us to formulate new hypotheses about both the use of the text and the composition of its audience.

1. Introduction

When, in 1989, Ronald Murphy’s \textit{The Saxon Savior: The Germanic Transformation of the Gospel in the Ninth-Century ‘Heliand’} was published, most critics welcomed it as a work comparable to that of the poet himself. A review which appeared in \textit{Speculum} (1992: 457-459) enthusiastically pointed out that:

\[\ldots\] the author [= Murphy] has managed to make the \textit{Heliand} more accessible to the English reader, to bring out the fascination of the work, the majesty of the alliterative verse, and the spiritual and emotional strength of its unnamed poet’s brilliant achievement.

The reading of the early ninth-century Old Saxon poem which Murphy provides in his notorious work – that is, a powerful re-imagining of the Gospel in heroic terms with Christ as leader of the apostolic warband – turns out to be at the basis of not only his own later prose translation of the \textit{Heliand}\(^1\) but

\(^1\) Murphy (1992).
also of much of the criticism up to today,² not to mention the hundreds of records and quotations contained in widespread anthological collections and school books.³ Thus, Murphy’s approach to the text has established itself as the standard, among both English-speaking scholars and general readers.

Though extremely fascinating and very appealing, the theory of the *saxonization* and *northernization* of the Gospel⁴ has ended up permeating every single level upon which an analysis of the poem can be carried out, becoming a sort of *a priori* starting point that may lead scholars to over-interpretation and, therefore, hinder them from developing a perhaps deeper insight into the poem. In particular, Murphy’s interpretation of the “rhetorical devices” used by the poet in order to make the Gospel sound more familiar to his Germanic audience proves to be not altogether convincing since, on the one hand, it conveys a one-sided representation of the poem set within a pagan “magical” framework and, on the other, is not supported by a thorough investigation of the linguistic evidence supplied by the text, both in itself and in its relation to the sources the *Heliand* authors drew upon.⁵

The aim of this paper is to provide a linguistic and philological interpretation of how the poets re-wrote their direct and indirect hypotexts⁶ as far as the information structure of the utterances is concerned.⁷ Furthermore, the context from which the poem springs – i.e., broadly speaking, the so-called “Carolingian culture and thought” – will be taken into consideration in order to account for the communicative choices made by the compilers.⁸

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² See, among others, Hare (2004 [footnote n. 11]).
³ James Cathey’s “school edition” of the *Heliand* [Cathey (2002)], which includes excerpts in Old Saxon amounting to almost 3,000 lines of the poem, contains a commentary highly dependent on Murphy (1989); (1992).
⁵ The hypothesis that the *Heliand* is the result of “teamwork” was put forward forcibly and convincingly in Haferland (2002).
⁶ See below, section 2. The poem is mainly based on Tatian’s *Diatessaron* “Harmony of the Gospels”; yet, it shows acquaintance also with the biblical commentaries of Alcuin, Bede, and Hraban Maur. Amongst them, Hraban’s *Expositio in Matthaeum* is considered to be a very important source, second only to Tatian. See Petersen (1995); Weber (1927).
⁷ See below, sections 3 and 5. Since a scientific approach should aim at isolating the variables under inspection, I will keep strictly faithful to this method. For this reason, I am not going to discuss here many other thorny issues pertaining to *Heliand*, such as metrics.
⁸ See below, sections 4 and 6.
2. *Old Saxon* giruni: magic or mystery?

1 Manega uuâron, the sia iro mōd gespôn,
2 .................. that sia bigunnun uuord godes,
3 recoekan that girûni, that thie rîceo Crist
4 undar mancunneâ mâriða gifrumida
5 mid uuordun endi mid uuercun.9

“There were many whose hearts told them that they should begin to tell the secret runes, the word of God, the famous feats that the powerful Christ accomplished in words and deeds among human beings”.10

These are the opening lines of the *Heliand*.11 These lines, which at first sight seem to pivot on the power of God’s spoken words (line 2: uuord godes; line 3: giruni; line 5: mid uuordun), have traditionally been interpreted as clear evidence of the presence of magic throughout the whole poem. According to Murphy, for example, the term giruni implies not only that the Gospel conveys God’s almighty speech, but also that this speech “is of the power of the magic spells and charms written in the runes of the Northern world”.12 This interpretation is apparently enhanced by the fact that the same term, geruni, occurs later on to introduce the ‘secret runes’ of the Lord’s Prayer, which thus would seem to be treated as just any other Germanic charm or spell:

1594 [...] Dô thîna iungorun sô self:
1595 gerihtÎ ūs that gerûni. [...] 
1600 Fadar ûsa firiho barno13

“Do this for Your own followers – teach us the secret runes [...] Father of us, the sons of men”.14

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10 Murphy (1992: 3).
11 The text of the Saxon poem has been preserved in two major manuscripts: M (Cgm. 25, Staatsbibliothek, Munich, first-half of the 9th century) and C (Cotton Caligula A.vii, British Library, London, second half of the 10th century). Fragments of the poem have survived in four other witnesses: V (Pal.lat. 1447, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, ll. 1279-1358); P (R 56/2537, Museum für deutsche Geschichte, Berlin, ex cod. XVI D 42, Universitní Knihovna, Prague, ll. 958b-1006a); S (the so-called “Straubing Fragment”, ll. 351-722, discovered in 1977 and found in very poor condition); L (the newly found – May 2006 – Leipzig fragment).
12 Murphy (1992: 3 [footnote n. 2]). As for the interpretation of this term, Murphy seems to adhere to the ancient scholarship going back to Grimm (1821). See also Lehmann (1986) and Kluge / Seebold (1995).
14 Murphy (1992: 54, 55).
The purpose of the poets, who look at the biblical world through Germano-Christian eyes, is supposed to be that of conveying a message using words and rhetorical devices which would sound more familiar to their Germanic audience. In so doing, they are said to have created a synthesis between Christianity and the Germanic warrior-society which “would ultimately lead to the culture of knighthood and become the foundation of medieval Europe”.15

If we stick to this reading of the poem – a reading which I do not deny, even though I am strongly convinced that other interpretations are possible and even more plausible – the re-writing of discourse features becomes a central issue within the process of reshaping the text of the Gospel. For example, assuming that the word of God, and specifically the “Our Father”, is transformed into a spell of great performative power implies that its discourse features have been re-written almost completely in order to turn it from a prayer into a sort of “holy charm”. Let’s consider, then, how and to what extent the information structure of the utterances and their speech acts are manipulated within a set of sample passages taken from the Old Saxon text.

As for the term giruni, which is supposed to provide a framework for a magic reading of the poem, it should be remembered that this is not a terminological innovation introduced by the Heliand poets. The same word appears in the main source text the compilers drew upon, that is, the Old High German translation of Tatian’s Diatessaron. In Tatian, giruni renders the Latin mysteria, “the secret words of God”, and is endowed with an overt theological meaning:

\[
\textit{Mt. 13, 11} \\
\textit{Qui respondens ait illis: quia vobis datum est nosse \textit{mysteria regni coelorum}, illis autem non est datum}
\]

\[
\textit{Tat. 74, 4} \\
\textit{Tho antlingenti quad in: iu ist gigeban zi uuizanne \textit{girunu} himilo rihhes, in nist iz gigeban}^{16}
\]

Furthermore, a conspicuous number of parallels\(^{17}\) can be found in the gothic tradition, where runa and runos are constantly used to translate

\(^{15}\) Murphy (1992: xiii).
\(^{16}\) Sievers (1892: 98).
\(^{17}\) Fourteen, if my estimate is correct: Luke 8,10; Mark 4,11; Rom. 11,25; Cor. I 13,2; 15,51; Efes. 1,9; 3,3; 3,4; 3,9; 6,19; Coloss. 1,26; 4,3; Tim. I 3,9; 3,16.
Gr. μυστήριον <mystērion> and μυστήρια <mystēria>, respectively, and Goth. garuni renders Gr. συμβούλιον <symboúlion>.

Mark 4, 11
CA jah qaþ im: izwis atgiban ist kunnan runa þiudangardjos gudis, iþ jainaim þaim uto in gajukom allata wairþþþ,
— And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables:
— καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς, ὃμιν τὸ μυστήριον δέδοται τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ: ἐκείνοις δὲ τοῖς ἔξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὰ πάντα γίνεται,

Luke 8, 10
CA iþ is qaþ: izwis atgiban ist kunnan runos þiudinassaus gudis; iþ þaim anþparaim in gajukom, ei saihvandans ni gasahvaina, jah gahausjandans ni fraþþjaina.
— And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.
— ὁ δὲ εἶπεν, ὃμιν δέδοται γνῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς ἐν παραβολαῖς, ἦν βλέποντες μὴ βλέπωσιν καὶ ἀκούοντες μὴ συνιῶσιν.

Matthew 27, 1
CA At maurgin þan waurþanana, runa nemun allai gudjans jah þai sinistans manageins bi lesu, ei afdauþidedeina ina.
C At maurgin þan waurþanana, garuni nemun allai þai gudjans jah þai ....
— When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death:
— πρωΐας δὲ γενοµένης συµβούλιον ἔλαβον πάντες οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι τοῦ λαοῦ κατὰ τοῦ ἱησοῦ ὡστε θανατώσαι αὐτόν:

Mark 3, 6
CA jah gaggandans þan Fareisaieis sunsaiw miþ þaim Herodianum garuni gatawidedun bi ina, ei imma usqemeina.
— And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.
— καὶ ἔξελθοντες οἱ φαρισαῖοι εὐθὺς μετὰ τῶν ἤρωδιανῶν συµβούλιον ἐδίδουν κατ’ αὐτοῦ ὅπως αὐτὸν ἀπολέσωσιν.

18 For a detailed discussion of three (most apparent) exceptions to this paradigm see Meli (1988: 65-66).
Mark 15,1

Jah sunsaiw in maugrin garuni taujandans þai auhumistans gudjans miþ þaim sinistam jah bokarjam, jah alla so gafaurds gabindandans Iesu brahtedun ina at Peilatau.
— And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate.

As for the Anglo-Saxon tradition, Christine Fell (1991) points out that the term *geryne* is most commonly modified by adjectives such as *halig* “holy” and *gaestlic* “spiritual”, thus concluding that “the various forms of *geryne* are not used for pagan belief […] but for […] the ‘mistery’ of Easter, of baptism, of the sacrament, of the Trinity [...]”.

Since there is no proof that either *runa* or *giruni* is used to convey the idea of “Germanic spell” in any of the theological texts which have come down to us, I would suggest that the term *giruni* in *Heliand* is primarily related to the apparent unaccessibility of the New Testament message. It seems to me that the author’s main point is that no one can approach the word of God on their own; the only possible way to penetrate the *mysterium* is to rely on what the four evangelists have written down since the four evangelists alone were taught what to write and sing by the greatest of masters, the Creator Himself.

In order to support this hypothesis with further evidence, it is necessary to move from the widely studied lexical layer to the much disregarded textual one.

3. How information is conveyed: existential sentences and contrastive focus

If we pay attention to the information structure of the utterances – rather than to single lexical items – we can easily realize that the discourse elements upon which the passage under inspection pivots appear in two parallel existential sentences (line 1a: *Manega uuaron* “There were many [...]”; line 9b: *than uuaron thoh sia fiori* “There were, however, these four [...]”) which

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introduces the discourse focus [F]; furthermore, the latter sets up a contrastive focus [CF] so that sia fiori “the four [evangelists]” can be interpreted as opposed to the manega “many” in line 1.

1 [Manega]F uuâron, the sia iro mòd gespôn, 
2 ........................, that sia bigunnun uuord godes, 
3 reckeán that girûni, that thie rícœ Crist 
4 undar mancunnea màriða gifrumida 
5 mid uuordun endi mid uuercun. That uuolda thò uuïsara filo 
6 liudo barno lobon, lêra Cristes, 
7 hêlag uuord godes, endi iro handon scriban 
8 berehtlico an buok, huò sia scoldin is gibodscipi 
9 frummian, firiho barn. Than uuârun thoh [sia fiori [te thiu]]CF 
10 under thera menigo, thia habdon maht godes, 
11 helpa fan himila, hêlagna gêst, 
12 craft fan Criste, – sia uuðun gicorana te thio, 
13 that sie than èvangelium ènan scoldun 
14 an buok scriban endi só manag gibod godes, 
15 hêlag himilisc uuord: sia ne muosta heliðo than mér, 
16 firiho barno frummian, neban that sia fiori te thio 
17 thuru craft godes gecorana uuðun, 
18 Matheus endi Marcus, – só uuârun thia man hêtana – 
19 Lucas endi Iohannes; sia uuârun gode lieba, 
20 uuîriða ti them giuuirkie. Habda im uualdand god, 
21 them heliðon an iro hertan hêlagna gêst 
22 fasto bifoðhan endi ferahtan hugi, 
23 só manag uuislik uuord endi giuuit mikil, 
24 that sea scoldin ahebbean hêlagaro stemnun 
25 godspell that guoda, 23

“There were many whose hearts told them that they should begin to tell the secret runes, the word of God, the famous feats that the powerful Christ accomplished in words and deeds among human beings. There were many of the wise who wanted to praise the teaching of Christ, the holy Word of God, and wanted to write a bright-shining book with their own hands, telling how the sons of men should carry out His commands. Among all these, however,

21 Contrastive focus picks out one element as prominent, mainly new information. Contrastive focus restricts a contextually presupposed closed set to an exhaustive subset for which the predicate actually holds. Even though in this specific example we are not able to appreciate the prosodic features — i.e. the contrastive accent — there is a textual element that helps us analyze it as a case of contrastive focus, namely thoh, which works as a presuppositional activator. See Levinson (1983 [1993: 175-231]). Anyway, fiori bears the metrical accent, since it alliterates with frummian and firiho in the a-verse.

22 On contrastive focus and other related notions see Chafe (1976); Levinson (1983 [1993]).

there were only four who had the power of God, help from heaven, the Holy Spirit, the strength from Christ to do it. They were chosen. They alone were to write down the evangelium in a book, and to write down the commands of God, the holy heavenly word. No one else among the heroic sons of men was to attempt it, since these four had been picked by the power of God: Matthew and Mark, Luke and John were their names. They were dear to God, worthy of the work. The ruling God had placed the Holy Spirit firmly in those heroes’ hearts, together with many a wise word, as well as a devout attitude and a powerful mind, so that they could lift up their holy voices to chant God’s spell.”

Since a Contrastive Focus-marked proposition presupposes either the denial or at least the suspension of its alternative propositions (this is a well-known phenomenon called “reversed polarity presupposition”), the use of this discourse strategy helps the poets convey the idea of Christian Truth as a part of God’s revelation by means of the chosen. Thus the four evangelists, later called by their names [Matheus, Marcus, Lucas, Iohannes] and seen as the only true messengers of God, are opposed to the anonymous “many” who ventured to praise the teaching of Christ by writing a book on him without being selected by the power of God. It should not be overlooked that such a strong message, put forth at the very beginning of the poem, is not to be found in the Tatian, which faithfully translates the Latin and keeps very close to its own primary source, that is the Prologue of Luke:

*Tat., Prologus*
1. Bithiu uuanta manage zilotun ordinon saga thio in uns gifulta sint rahono,

4. The re-writing of discourse features as a means of conveying an orthodox theological message

The new reading – we could say, the new path – sorted out in the Heliand and deeply rooted in the clever manipulation of its discourse features on the part of the authors, as shown above, is rich in theological implications. One is in fact reminded of a theological framework which goes back to Origen (Ecclesia quattuor habet evangelia, haeresis plurima) whose function within the Old Saxon poem can be better understood if we consider that ex-

24 Murphy (1992: 3-4).
25 Sievers (1892: 13).
tirpating heterodoxical practice – not necessarily pagan – was one of the main concerns of the religious policy carried out in Fulda at the time, especially because of the presence there of Hraban Maur as abbot. In Hraban’s famous work *De rerum naturis* or *De Universo*, two books – n. 4 and n. 5 – are entirely dedicated to the “True Faith” as opposed to “heresy”. The titles of the sections that make up the two books are listed below:

4.1 *De his personis quae ad Novum Testamentum pertinent.*
4.2 *De martyribus.*
4.3 *De Ecclesia et Synagoga.*
4.4 *De religione et fide.*
4.5 *De clericis.*
4.6 *De Monachis.*
4.7 *De caeteris fidelibus.*
4.8 *De haeresi et schismate.*
4.9 *De haeresibus Judaeorum.*
4.10 *De diffinitionibus rectae fidei et ecclesiasticorum dogmatum.*

5.1 *De sanctis Scripturis, hoc est Veteri et Novo Testamento.*
5.2 *De auctoribus eorumdem librorum.*
5.3 *Brevis annotatio, quae indicat quid in sanctis canonicos libris continetur.*
5.4 *De bibliotheca.*
5.5 *De opusculorum diversitate.*
5.6 *De canonibus Evangeliorum.*
5.7 *De canonibus conciliorum.*
5.8 *De cyclo paschali.*
5.9 *De officiis canonicos, et de his quae in Ecclesia leguntur atque canuntur.*
5.10 *De hostiis holocaustis atque sacrificiis, et quod eorum species singulae significent.*
5.11 *De sacramentis divinis: ubi quid in his homini gerendum sit, demonstratur.*
5.12 *De exorcismo.*
5.13 *De symbolo.*
5.14 *De oratione et jejunio.*
5.15 *De poenitentiae satisfactione atque exomologesi.*

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26 Fulda played a leading role in the foundation of new episcopal bishoprics in the Saxon territory after its forcible conversion at the beginning of the ninth century. Fulda is also the most favored place of origin for the *Heliand*, the others being Corvey and Werden.

27 A pseudo-scientific encyclopedic treatise, which is essentially a reworking of Isidor’s *Etymologies*. The *De rerum naturis* depicts the whole Universe as a manifestation of God.

28 *PLD*, vol. 111.
It should also be noted that Book 4 (n. 1: De his personis quae ad Novum Testamentum pertinent) opens with a reference to the evangelists and the New Testament. Since most of the heretical movements are christological, Hraban’s primary and main concern seems to be that of assessing the New Testament sources which are to be considered orthodox beyond all doubt:

In primis igitur notandum est, quod quatuor evangelistae Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum sub quatuor animalium vultibus figuraliter exprimunt. Matthaeus enim eundem Redemptorem natum et passum annuntians, in similitudinem hominis comparat. [Col.0071C] Marcus a solitudo exorsus leonis figuram induit, et Christi regnum invictum, potentiamque proclamat. Lucas quoque per vituli mysticum vultum Christum pro nobis praedicat immolandum. Joannes autem per figuram aquilae eundem Christum post resurrectionem carnis demonstrat revolasse in coelos.29

In Book 5 (n. 2: De auctoribus eorumdem librorum and n. 3: Brevis annotation, quae indicat quid in sanctis canonicos libris contineatur) the author deals with the evangelists once more and describes the set of symbols pertaining to them.


29 De rerum naturis, 4.1. PLD, vol. 111.
RE-WRITING DISCOURSE FEATURES: SPEECH ACTS IN _HELIAND_


Furthermore, a whole section (n. 6: _De canonibus Evangeliorum_) is devoted to the way in which the four canonical Gospels were fixed.


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30 _De rerum naturis_, 5.2. _PLD_, vol. 111.
31 _De rerum naturis_, 5.3. _PLD_, vol. 111.

Hraban’s struggle against heterodoxy is confirmed by his strong opposition to Gottschalk (ca. 803-867), a monk of Saxon origin, whose predestination theory was condemned as heretical.  

Thus, the orthodox bias of the Heliand I’m suggesting here, appears to be consistent with the cultural, historical and theological background the poem is supposed to spring from, and is further enhanced by thematic evidence. For the sake of brevity, I’ll mention only a few relevant examples. First, throughout the whole poem Christ is shown as being one and the same with the Lord of Creation.
thus setting aside even the slightest risk of Adoptionism.35 When Peter confesses
the Nature of Christ, he says:

3057 ‘thu bist the uuâro uuâlandandes sunu,
3058 libbiendes godes, the thit lioht giscop,
3059 Crist cuing êuui: sô uuilliad uui queðen alle,
3060 iungaron thîne, that thu sîs god selbo,
3061 héleandero bezt.”36

“You are the true Son of the Ruler, the living God, who created this light,
Christ, King forever! All of us, Your followers, want to say that You are God
Himself, the Greatest of healers.”37

The stress is here on the assertive utterance (thu sîs god selbo, héleandero bezt) introduced by the verb queðan “affirm, declare” and reinforced by the modal uuillian “want”. In Tat. 90, 2 instead, no overt mention of the identity between the two persons – father and son – is made:

Dicit illis: vos autem quem me esse dicitis? Respondens Simon Petrus dixit:
tu es Christus filius dei vivi. Respondens autem Ihesus dixit: beatus es Simon
Bar - Iona, quia caro et sanguis non revelavit tibi, sed pater meus qui in
caelis est.

Tho quad her in: ir uuarlicho uuen mih quedet uuesen? Tho antuurtita
Simon Petrus inti quad: thu bist Christ sun gotes lebentiges. Tho
antuurtita der heilant inti quad: salig bist Simon tubun sun, uuanta fleisg inti
bluot ni gioffonata thir thaz, oh min fater der in himile ist.38

Second, the relevance attributed to the figure of Peter, who is portrayed as
being especially close to Christ and second only to him, may reveal an intent
to emphasize the power of the Roman ecclesiastical hierarchy since, at the
time, popes consistently referred to themselves as vicars of Peter and were
depicted in iconography upon his throne. Thus, Peter symbolizes much more
than simply “the archetypal Saxon warrior”, becoming instead an out-
standing symbol of orthodoxy, the embodiment of (Roman) Church hierar-
chy.

35 In the Carolingian age Adoptionism was a very common heresy against which also Charle-
magne had violently fought, calling Alcuin in his aid. Alcuin’s most outstanding pupil, Hra-
ban Maur, became his spiritual heir in that he faithfully followed the vestigia patrum and
37 Murphy (1992: 100).
38 Sievers (1892: 129).
5. The manipulation of speech acts in miracles and prayers

Let’s now move to the core of the present paper, that is the manipulation of speech acts, particularly as they appear in miracles and prayers. It has often been noted by scholars that in the Heliand the miracles carried out by Christ are reported in indirect speech. The words pronounced by the Son of God are consistently omitted, thus the general assumption is made that the author was afraid of the consequences of revealing them to the Saxons; if the audience had learned the powerful words of Christ, they would be urged to use them due to the Germanic “belief in secret spells and in their intrinsic performative ability”. In my opinion this interpretation is not supported by sufficient textual evidence and relies only upon extralinguistic inference.

If we consider the wedding feast at Cana, we notice that the poet has expanded and re-written its source text using assertives to replace directives. Tat. 45, 4-6

4. Erant autem ibi lapideq hydriq sex posite secundum purificationem Iudærorn, capientes singule metretas binas vel ternas. (John 2, 6)
Thar uuurun steininu uuazzarfaz sehso gisezitu after subernessi thero ludeono, thiu bihaben mohltun einero giuuelih zuei méz odo thriu.

5. Dicit eis Ihesus: implete hydrias aqua. Et impleverunt eas usque ad summum. (John 2, 7)
Thó quad ín ther heilant: fullet thiu faz mit uuazaru. Inti sie fultun siu únzan enti.

39 On the shift between direct and indirect speech throughout the whole poem, very interesting remarks are to be found in Guerrieri (1985-86).
40 Flowers (1986); Murphy (1989), (1992: 68 [n. 102]). From a technical point of view the term ‘performative’ was introduced by Austin in How to Do Things with Words (1962 [1975: 5]) to label the utterances that, unlike constatives, are not subject to the truth/falsity conditions of propositional knowledge. Austin assumes that these utterances exist as acts in themselves, that is as performatives. Austin's archetypal examples of these are the acts of naming, marrying, bequeathing and betting. Since Austin’s time, scholarly research on this topic has widely developed, putting forth further distinctions. See, e.g., Conte (1972); (1983).
41 I refer here to the five basic categories of illocutionary acts elaborated by Searle (1969): 1) assertives, i.e. statements that may be judged true or false because they purport to describe a state of affairs in the world; 2) directives, i.e. statements that attempt to make the auditor’s actions fit the propositional content; 3) commissives, i.e. statements which commit the speaker to a course of action as described by the propositional content; 4) declarations, i.e. statements that attempt to change the world by “representing it as having been changed”; 5) expressives, i.e. statements that express a psychological state.
6. *Et dicit eis Ihesus: haurite nunc et ferte architriclino. Et tulerunt.* (John 2, 8)

Thó quâd ín ther heilant: *skephet* nú inti *bringet* themo furistsizzenten. Inti sie bráhtun.42

**Heliand, 2036b-2048a**

2036 […] Lárea stôðun thar
2037 stênfatu sehsi. […]

2040 **he hêt** thea skenkeon thô  skîreas uuatares
2041 thi fuatu **fullien**, endi hi thar mid is fingrun thô,
2042 segnade selbo  sinun handun,
2043 **uuarhte it te uuine**  endi hêt is an èn uuêgi hlaðen,
2044 **skeppien** mid ènoro scâlon,  endi thô te them skenkeon sprac,
2045 **hêt is** thero gesteo,  the at them gômun uuas
2046 themu hêroston  **an hand geban**,  
2047 ful mid folmun,  themu the thes folkes thar
2048 geuueld aftar themu *uuerde*.

“Six stone vats were standing there empty. […] He told those who were pouring to fill the vats there with clear water, and then He made the sign of the cross over it with His fingers, with His own hands – He worked it into wine! Then He ordered it poured into a drinking vessel, drawn off with a pitcher, and then speaking to a servant, He told him to give it to the most important person at the wedding, to put it right into the hands of the one who had the most authority over those people after the host.”43

The imperatives *fullet, skephet, bringet* in Tatian becomes *he het fullien, het skeppien, het an hand geban* in the *Heliand*. Yet, the Saxon poem does not omit any spell at all, since no spell is present either in the direct source text (i.e. *Tatian*), or in the indirect one (i.e. the Gospel of John, chapter 2). The words which Christ is supposed to have used in order to change the water into wine (that is, the words endowed with the alleged performative power) are kept secret in any case, therefore this omission cannot be ascribed to the Saxon text as one of its peculiar features.

Thus, the crucial point is not why the poets omitted the Savior’s words, but why they decided to replace directive speech acts with assertive speech acts. The answer I suggest is that the speaker thereby signals his maximum commitment to the truth of the proposition which is thus presented to the hearer as a fact undoubtedly true. This reading is reinforced by the further expansions the poets made. In line 2043a, for example, they introduced a new

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42 Sievers (1892: 68).
statement (again, a categorical assertion: *uuarhte it te uuine* “He worked it into wine”) whose function is not only to describe what was happening, but also to testify to the truth of it: “We tell you and assure you – the water was turned into wine!”. This is consistent with the exhortation to “trust well” and “have faith in Christ” which is scattered throughout the whole poem as a sort of leitmotif.44

As for the Lord’s Prayer, the acts of speech we can find in the text are a type of directives that bear the illocutionary force of petitions and supplications to God, the Creator of both the heavenly and earthly Kingdom.

*Tat. 34, 6*

[...] *fater unser, thu bist in himile, si giheilot thin namo, queme thin rihhi, si thin uuiilo, sò hër in himile ist, sò si hër in erdu, unsar brót tagalihbaz gib uns hiitu, inti furlaz uns unsara sculdi, sò uuîr fùr-

lazemes unsaren sculdigon, inti ni gileitest unsih in costunga, ûzouh árlosi unsih fon ubile.45*

*Helian, 1600-1612*

1600 Fadar ûsa firiho barno,  
1601 thu bist an them hôhon himilo rîkea,  
1602 *geuuihid sì thin namo uuordo gehuuilico.*  
1603 *Cuma thin craftag riki.*  
1604 *Uuerða thin uuileo obar thesa uuerold alla,*  
1605 sò sama an erðo, sò thar uppa ist  
1606 an them hôhon himilo rîkea.  
1607 *Gef ûs dago gehuuilikes râd, drohtin the gôdo,*  
1608 thîna hêlaga helpa, endi *alât ûs,* hebenes uuard,  
1609 managoro mënsculdio, al sò uue oðrum mannum dûan.  
1610 *Ne lât ûs farlêdean lêða uuhti*  
1611 sò forð an iro uuilleon, sò uui uuîriege sind,  
1612 ac *help ûs uuîðar allun* ubilon dádiun.46

No textual evidence suggests that the Lord’s Prayer has been turned into a “charm”. In a charm we find a different kind of directives that bear the illo-

ctionary force of commands and are endowed with a peculiar performative value commonly defined as *ontopoietic*: a charm is used to build up an *ontic*

44 If the true aim of the poets was instead to stress the “magic power” of God’s word, providing a sort of comparison with the power of Germanic lore, the addressee would be extremely disappointed by the omission of the relevant passage.  
45 Sievers (1892: 55-56).  
status, that is to bring a new reality into being.\textsuperscript{47} Here, instead, only the Holy Father can bring about changes. Thus it seems to me that the \textit{Pater Noster} still remains a prayer and that there’s no need to consider it a magic spell in order to account for its granting immediate access to God.\textsuperscript{48} The undeniable changes from the source text (see lines 1602b and 1610b) do pertain to a different level of interpretation. For example, since it is difficult to imagine God deliberately leading us into tempting situations, the \textit{Helian} poets solved the puzzling supplication “lead us not into temptation” by attributing the circumstances of our being led astray to evil creatures (line 1610b: \textit{lēða suuihti}). In a Christian perspective, \textit{caput omnium malorum diabolus est},\textsuperscript{49} so there’s no need to interpret the evil creatures as “variants of gnomes and trolls and little people who can be blamed for things that go wrong”.\textsuperscript{50} The Christian \textit{demones} perfectly suit this purpose.

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\textsuperscript{47} Buzzoni (1996: 98-103, especially 102).

\textsuperscript{48} The textual parallel introduced by Murphy (1992: 215-217) to support this hypothesis, that is the very letters of the \textit{Pater noster} written in runes and therefore endowed with magic power within a passage of the Old English poem \textit{Solomon and Saturn I}, is not altogether convincing. In fact, of the two manuscripts that transmit the poem – Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, mss. 41 and 422 –, only the latter contains runic symbols before their roman capital equivalents. In ms. 41, which gives the poem in its early state, no rune is present. The \textit{Pater noster} letters are entirely represented by individual roman capitals separated from the rest of the text by mid-line points. Thus, on the basis of the codicological evidence, I am inclined to share Page’s opinion according to which the use of the runic characters in this poem is probably due to their epigraphical and monumental quality, rather than to magic in a pagan sense. “This quality Anglo-Saxon scribes sometimes profited by when they wanted to make individual letters stand out from the surrounding text [...]” [Page (1999: 187)]. Furthermore, the acrostic technique as a kind of intellectual game was widespread in the Christian Latin Literature of the Middle Ages; its usage “can be traced back as far as the alphabetic psalms on the Old Testament, where each verse begins with one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.” [Halsall (1981: 42)]. The adding of runes before the Roman capital characters in ms. 422 may well be due to a mere cultural motivation of giving the Germanic alphabet the same value as the others.

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{De rerum naturis}, 6.3. \textit{PLD}, vol. 111.

\textsuperscript{50} Murphy (1989: 91).
Item lamia, haerетicus vel quilibet hypocrita, ut Isaia dicit: *Cubavit lamia, et invenit sibi requiem* (Isa. XXXIV).51

What is more, in lines 1030-1032 a similar expression, *craftiga uuihti* “powerful creatures”, refers to the devil and his followers who are depicted as the cause of all sin:

1030 uuelda is thar lâtan *coston* craftiga uuihti,
1031 selbon *Satanasan*, the gio an *sunde apa* spenit,
1032 man *an mêmuruêrk*;52

“He wanted to let powerful creatures test him, even Satan, who is always spur-ring men on to sin and malicious deeds”.53

As for the expansion introduced in line 1602b: *geuuihid sî thin namo uuordo gehuuiico* “blessed be your name in every word (spoken)”, it sounds to me like a warning to those who use their words in order to spread God’s message, most probably to the missionary monks themselves. I see in this injunction a covert threat to those who risk falling into heresy, not paying enough attention to the true word of God.

6. Final remarks

In my opinion, the “received” interpretation of the *Heliand* as a book of “charming performative magic” is based on (at least) two misunderstandings. First, a misunderstanding about the linguistic meaning of the term ‘performative’. Murphy (1992: 206), for example, following Flowers (1986), identifies the idea of ‘performative speech’ with ‘spell, runes, curses’, that is, with magic. This is not true from a linguistic point of view and therefore can be considered as an *overinterpretation*. Legal formulae, for example, are often endowed with a performative value and yet have little to do with magic.54 Furthermore, talking of ‘performative speech’ in general is indeed an *over simplification*. There are, in fact, many different kinds of performatives; to mention only a few: implicit vs. explicit performatives; ontopoietic (linked to magic) vs. deontopoietic (linked to legal formulae) performatives; etc.55 Sec-

51 *De rerum naturis*, 8.1. PLD, vol. 111.
53 Murphy (1989: 36).
55 See Austin (1962); Conte (1983); Conte (1995); Buzzoni (1996).
ond, a misunderstanding about the theological value of secrecy and mystery, which is linked to *mysterium* of the True Faith, rather than to the pure Germanic idea of charm or spell.

The study of how discourse features were re-written and re-used by the compilers leads to a very peculiar interpretation of the poem. If one puts together the pieces of information gathered so far, one may come to the final conclusion that the *Heliand*, rather than being a work directly addressed to pagan lay peoples in order to persuade them to follow the new Faith, is instead a learned product addressed to already-converted monks. The *Heliand* appears indeed as a “Saxonization” of the Gospel, Jesus is indeed portrayed as a Germanic *drohtin*, the Mediterranean vessels are indeed turned into high-horned northern boats. Yet, all these adaptations take place within an orthodox Christian framework. To my mind, the main purpose of this verse reworking of the Gospel was to promote orthodoxy as a reaction against the dangerous heterodox teachings which were spreading at the time, so that those monks who were in charge of the conversion of the Saxons could do their job avoiding the risk of heresy.

This assumption goes a step beyond what has already been stated by, among others, Cyril Edwards (1994: 153) who, commenting on the Latin *Praefatio* to the poem, assumes that:

The *Praefatio* also contains tantalising hints as to the audience of the *Heliand*. It specifies reception by the *illiterati*, and indeed by ‘all the people subjects to Louis who speak the German language’, but it also states that the biblical chapter headings accorded to the work’s *fitts* are intended to help the ‘zealous reader’. There would seem to be a dichotomy here: the desire to reach the whole of the populace by translating Holy Writ is very much in the spirit of the Carolingian Church reforms, but the chapter-headings point

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56 It shouldn’t be overlooked that the monastic expressions scattered throughout the poem – for example, the reference to the canonical hours in *fitt* 42 – are consistent with this interpretation of the text.

57 See, for example, the above-mentioned views on predestination put forth by Gottschalk.

58 The prose *Praefatio in librum antiquum lingua Saxonica conscriptum*, together with the *Versus de poeta et ininterprete huius codicis*, was published by M. Flacius Illyricus in 1562 and, if genuine, it represents an important source for a contextualization of the *Heliand*, since it refers to *Ludouuicus piissimus Augustus* – probably Louis the Pious (814-840) or Louis the German (843-876) – as the commissioner of the work. See Behaghel / Taeger (1996: xxxiii-xxxviii).

to use within the monastery, during divine office or for readings in the refectory. Perhaps only on those occasions when the laity were admitted to the Church did the *Heliand* reach a wider audience.

The linguistic analysis carried out in this essay has contributed to finding out at least one possible reason why already-converted and learned monks should be exposed to the reading of a re-elaboration of the Gospel in their own language: it is reasonable to suppose that the poem was used as a sort of didactic tale,\(^{60}\) with the precise intent of both preventing monks from yielding to the folly of heterodox thought and teaching them how to diffuse the True Christian Message among still pagan or newly converted peoples.

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\(^{60}\) Many scholars have underlined the ‘narrative’ nature of the *Heliand* verse structure. Bostock, e.g., maintains that “The *Heliand* seems to stand at the end of a literary movement. [...] The ‘Hakenstil’ is more prevalent than in other epic or lay; long sentences, elaborate periods, and indirect speech are common; the masses of unstressed syllables, the numerous ‘Schwellverse’, and the extensive use of epic variation may well be signs of late techniques”. He also adds that “typical of the preacher or orator are the formal phrases asking for the patience of the listeners.” [Bostock (1976: 177)].
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*PLD = Patrologia Latina. The Full Text Database*, 221 volumes, a complete electronic version of the first edition of Jacques-Paul Migne’s *Patrologia Latina* (1844-1855 and 1862-1865), http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk/ [last visit: July 2005].


**Reviews**