

A Reconsideration of Old English *fāh*

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Abstract The Old English (OE) adjective *fāh*—a word bearing a complex semantic profile and appearing in both poetic and non-poetic genres—has recently come under scrutiny. Filip Missuno argues that although *fāh* is usually listed in lexical aids as two separate lemmata, the words had actually fallen together into one polysemous lexeme bearing meanings of both lemmata, and that *fāh* 2 ‘particolored’ had disappeared as a separate lexeme in OE. Through diachronic evidence of pre-OE and post-OE forms, and through synchronic evidence that examines *fāh*’s place in the whole of the OE lexicon (rather than just poetry, as Missuno does), I demonstrate that *fāh* 1 ‘hostile’ and *fāh* 2 ‘particolored’ are in fact separate lexemes, and their lexical relationship is one of homophony and not polysemy. I also show that the allomorphic forms *fāg* 1 and *fāg* 2, previously thought to be the result of phonological processes in late OE, actually date from pre-Germanic and are beginning to show principled differentiation in OE records: allomorph *fāg* is being associated with the ‘particolored’ meaning while allomorph *fāh* is associated with the ‘hostile’ meaning. This association is loose in OE but produces distinct reflexes in late Middle English (*foe* from *fāh*, and *fawe* from *fāg*) with clearly differentiated semantics. Missuno is correct that the meanings of *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2 show some overlap with one another, but I argue that this is an example of conventionalized word play, creating intentional associations between two distinct lexemes, rather than a seamless polysemous blend.

Keywords Old English language · Old English poetry · Philology · English lexical semantics · Lexicography · Historical linguistics

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In a recent article in this journal, Missuno (2015) discusses the Old English adjective *fāh* and its meanings. Using a methodology that he calls “philologically-minded literary-critical approach”, Missuno examines the use of *fāh* in the Old English (OE) poetic corpus. This was surely a study long overdue, and one that offers an invaluable analysis of the synchronic use of *fāh* in poetry. Missuno offers a rich and compelling argument for how to interpret this multi-faceted word in Old English verse, and especially in *Beowulf*. Mainly occurring in poetry, *fāh* is typically listed in dictionaries and glossaries as two separate lemmata. In Toronto’s *Dictionary of Old English* (Cameron et al. 2009; *DOE*), for instance, *fāh* 1 is defined as ‘hostile, in a state of enmity’ and *fāh* 2 as ‘particolored, variegated’, with a number of specialized sub-definitions such as ‘bloodstained’, ‘stained (with sin/crimes), i.e., guilty’ (*DOE*, s.vv. *fāh* 1, *fāg* 1; *fāh* 2, *fāg* 2). For both *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2, there exists a phonetic variant *fāg*, which often appears in the oblique cases. I discuss this form in detail in the “Origin of the g-form *fāg*” section.¹

Fāh 1 and *fāh* 2 derive from homophonous lexemes in Proto-Germanic (PGmc), reconstructed as *faixaz* I and *faixaz* II, which were distinct as far back as Proto-Indo-European (PIE), with both reflexes developing from **peik⁻¹* and **peik⁻²*, a homophonous pair.² But Missuno argues that by the time of the writing of OE verse, the once-distinct meanings had fallen together to form a single polysemous lexeme, meaning something like ‘variegated in pattern, bearing overtones of violence, slaughter, doom’. The modern reader, he argues, should avoid the lexicographic pitfall of choosing one meaning over another for a given occurrence of the word; rather, she should understand that *all* instances of *fāh* in OE poetry represent a complex web of meanings related to guilt, crime, and blood. In Missuno’s words, “*Fāh* is a volatile quality, spreading across semantic categories, yet remains a coherent semantic phenomenon... [meaning] a beautiful/fateful coating of gleaming guilt/hostility/awe” (139).

His literary arguments, focused on contextualizing uses of *fāh* in poetry, are convincing: he demonstrates that *fāh* occurs in special collocations where the meaning ‘hostile, guilty’ always pervades even seemingly innocent readings of *fāh* as ‘multicolored’ (e.g., the *fagne flor* of Heorot is not only “patterned” with colorful tiles, but also “stained by gore” as a result of Grendel’s hostile actions) (Fulk et al. 2008: 1. 725). He outlines those poetic contexts as (1) moral evil/sins, (2) gold/treasure/ornamentation, (3) blood, (4) swords, (5) serpents. What Missuno misses in his argument, though, is the fact that OE *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2 really were separate homophonous lexemes throughout the OE period. The evidence for this claim is simple: not only did *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2 derive from a homophonous pair in PGmc and before that, in PIE, but

¹ For the sake of clarity, I call *fāh* the ‘h-form’ and *fāg* the ‘g-form’.

² For Germanic reconstructions, I have consulted Orel’s *A handbook of Germanic etymology* (2003). For PIE, I rely on Pokorny’s *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (1959); Rix & Kümmel’s *Lexikon der indogermanischen Verben* (2001); and Watkins’ *The American heritage dictionary of Indo-European roots* (2000). Typically, **peig-* (or **peig⁻*) is listed as an unexplained alternate form of **peik⁻¹* and **peik⁻²*. **peik⁻¹* has reflexes in Lat. *pingo* ‘paint’, Grk *ποικίλος* ‘colored’, Skt *pésas* ‘shape, form, color’, and Lithuanian *piēšti* ‘paint, write’. **peik⁻²* has reflexes in Lat. *piget* ‘make angry’, Skt *písuna-* ‘angry minded’ and *písāca-* ‘demon’ See section “*fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2 as separate lexemes: the diachronic evidence” below on the relationship between these roots.

more importantly, they also survive into the late Middle English (ME) period as separate lexemes: *fāh* 1 survives in the form of Present Day English (PDE) *foe* meaning ‘at enmity with; enemy’,³ while *fāh* 2 survives into the sixteenth century as *faw* meaning ‘colored, stained; particolored, variegated’.⁴ Had *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2 actually collapsed into a single word with a single complex meaning, they would not have been able to emerge in later periods as semantically and phonologically distinct.

While Missuno’s argument is incomplete regarding the full historical development of *fāh* and incorrect about its lexical status in OE, I think that his conclusions about the literary interpretation of instances of *fāh* are enlightening and correct. In fact, a better understanding of the lexical status of *fāh* in OE further supports Missuno’s arguments about *fāh*’s ability to draw together associations of both gleaming gold and bloody violence. But this association, I argue, is itself a poetic convention that plays on the distinct meanings of *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2, rather than a seamless fusion of multiple meanings in a single lexeme.

fāh 1 and *fāh* 2 as Separate Lexemes: The Diachronic Evidence

The pre-OE evidence for *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2 as separate lexemes is given above. It is tempting to try to resolve the apparent homophony of PGmc *faixaz* I and *faixaz* II, as well as PIE *peik*⁻¹ and *peik*⁻², but the etymological dictionaries list them as separate lexemes because of the clear evidence of the reflexes with distinct meanings, and because of the semantic disparity between ‘paint’ and ‘hostility’ in PIE and ‘particolored/variegated’ and ‘hostility’ in PGmc. The synchronic OE evidence for *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2 as separate lexemes is treated below in the “[Semantics of *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2: Synchronic evidence](#)” section.

More important than the Pre-OE and the synchronic OE evidence for *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2 as separate lexemes is the Post-OE evidence of ME and Early Modern English (EModE). As Missuno acknowledges, the evidence of separate lexemes is well-known for the Pre-OE period, but it would be possible to suppose that the two collapsed into one complex polyvalent lexeme in the (late) OE period. However—and this is not well-known—OE *fāh* did survive as two phonetically and semantically distinct lexemes in Middle English.⁵ In fact, contextualizing the OE evidence with the evidence of later periods shows not only that *fāh* was two lexemes, but also that the *g*-form *fāg* (often thought to be totally interchangeable for *fāh*) emerged as the preferred form for the meaning ‘particolored’, while the *h*-form

³ *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* s.v. *foe*, as an adjective, ‘hostile, unfriendly, in a state of enmity (to, with)’ disappeared in the early seventeenth century; *foe*, as a noun, ‘deadly enemy; personal enemy’ is now somewhat archaic but continues in use until the present day.

⁴ *OED* s.v. *faw*, adj., 1.a. ‘colored, stained, streaked; particolored, variegated’: this meaning, recorded as early as c.700 in the *Épinal Glossary*, continues until c.1522 according to the *OED*. As a noun, *faw* continues in use into the nineteenth century to refer to a gypsy, or attributively as *faw gang* (a gang of gypsies), which is clearly metonymic.

⁵ Missuno mentions that OE *fāh* survives as *foe* and *fawe* (127), but he does not trace the implications of the survival of *fāg* 2 as *faw(e)*, which is key. The persistence of *faw(e)* into the EModE period meaning ‘(multi)colored’ is evidence that *fāh* 2 ‘particolored’ had not disappeared from OE, as I argue in more detail in the “[Semantics of *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2: Synchronic evidence](#)” section.

fāh emerged as the form meaning ‘hostile’. This ‘preference’ (not a hard and fast rule) for the *g*-form with the ‘particolored’ meaning and the *h*-form with the ‘hostile’ meaning is also detectable in the OE sources, contrary to Missuno’s assertion that there is no semantic difference between the *g*-form and *h*-form. The origin and appearance of the *g*-form is discussed in detail in the “Origin of the *g*-form *fāg*” section.

The ME headword *fou*, *faʒ*—represented by the spellings *fou*, *faʒ*, *foaʒe*, *fogh*, *foh*, *fouh*, *vouh*, *faʒ(e)*, *vaze*, *fah*, *fau*, *fawe*—means ‘particolored, speckled, colorful’ (*Middle English Dictionary (MED)* s.v. *fou*). Spelling multiplicity of this kind (representing phonological and orthographic variants) is typical of ME.⁶ The <h>, <ʒ>, and <gh> spellings in *faʒ*, *fogh*, *foh*, *fouh*, *vuoh* probably represent [x] (from OE [x] after back vowels)⁷; these forms with presumed voiceless fricatives may have derived from OE *fāh* (through conservation of word-final *-h*) or from *fāg* (through devoicing of [ɣ]). The spellings with <w> in the forms listed above present the most telling data. Despite appearing from the *MED* entry that the <w> spellings are dispreferred, it is the <w> form that survives into EModE (regarding *faw(e)*, see fn. 4 above).⁸

In this phonetic environment, the <w> forms can only derive from OE [ɣ] (word-medial *g*), e.g., from *fage*, *fagan*. Traditional phonological accounts (Fulk 2012: §24; Jordan 1925: §111–113; Lass 1992: §2.3.3) state that the voiced velar fricative [ɣ] became [w] in ME, e.g., OE *āgan* > ME *owe*, and OE *lagu* > ME *lawe*. OE [ɣ] is an allophone of /g/ occurring only between back vowels or after a back vowel and before a front vowel.⁹ Thus, *faw(e)* must derive from the oblique cases rather than the nominative. OE/g/in word-final position (e.g., nominative *fāg*, realized as [g]) would have undergone late OE devoicing, producing [x] after back vowel /a/, and written as <gh>, <ʒ>, or <h> (Jordan 1925: §196–198; Lass 2006: §2.6.2.2; Fisiak 1968: §1.65).

There are no ME forms with fricatives <h>, <gh>, or liquid <w> attested in the *MED* with the meaning ‘hostility; foe’. The *h*-form *fāh* survived into ME and PDE as *foe*, an outcome possible only from a final *-h*. This is slightly counterintuitive, since word-final *-h* (OE [x] or [ç]) survives into early ME as [x]¹⁰; however, like the

⁶ The forms with [o] are reflexes of OE [a:], with OE [a:] becoming [o:] in all southern dialects (Jordan 1925: §44–45; Fulk 2012: §19).

⁷ See fn. 10 below for the outcome of OE /x/ in ME.

⁸ Supporting the evidence of the <w> forms, which certainly represent glides, are forms of the word spelled with <au> and <ou>, which most likely represent glides. Fisiak (1968: §1.44–45) claims that both <aw> and <au> could represent /aw/ and <aw, au, ou, ow> could represent /ow/, e.g., *blawe*, *blouen*, *blowen*, etc. But the <ou> spelling may at times also represent [o:] (Fisiak 1968: §1.38); see also Fulk (2012: §24.2). Thus, spellings <fau> and <fou> may have been pronounced with glides, especially in inflected forms, and may thus also derive from OE [ɣ].

⁹ OE /g/ is complex and has generated significant debate. See Hogg 1992b: 91 for a useful summary of the dispute over the shift from Gmc /ɣ/ to OE /g/. For more extensive discussion, see Hogg 1992a: §7.15–32.

¹⁰ Most accounts of ME phonology claim a reduction of allophones of OE /x/ from [x] (before back vowels) and [ç] (before front vowels) to just [x] in all environments (Jordan 1925: §197–198; Luick 1964: §636; Lass 1992: §2.4.1.2). How long and in what environments [ç] endured is uncertain, and not usually treated in the literature. Fisiak (1968: §2.57), Fulk (2012: §35), and Lass (2006: §2.6.2.2) assume some persistence of [ç] in the early ME period, but later in the period, perhaps by 1400, [x] had either become [f] (as in ‘enough’) or had disappeared.

oblique cases of *fāg* described above (e.g., *fage*, *fagan*), the phonetics of the oblique cases of *fāh* produce the ME reflex. The *DOE* lists a number of oblique forms of *fāh* that show *h*-deletion (e.g., *fane*, *fara*, *faum*). Word-medial *h*-deletion follows the usual pattern of contraction found in pre-OE, cf. **seahan* > *sēon*, **fleahan* > *flēon* (etymological word-medial **h* disappears before the OE period by contraction; see Campbell 1959: §234–39, §461). Word-medial **g* was not lost in pre-OE, as past participle forms *segon* and *flegon* attest; alternation between **h* and *g* in *flēon*: *flegon*, *sēon*:*segon* is attributable to processes associated with Verner's Law. Thus, nominative *fā* is a back-formation from the oblique cases¹¹; and it is OE *fā* that produces ME *fō* and thence PDE *foe*. The *MED* entries list ME headwords *fō* (as an adj.; also *fā*) and *fō* (as a noun; also *fā*, *vō*, *vā*) (*MED* s.v. *fō*, adj. and noun). This reflex of OE *fāh* has no corresponding forms derived from OE *fāg*.

From the ME evidence, we can see that a process of differentiation has clearly taken place, where the *g*-form became associated with the 'particolored' meaning and the *h*-form became associated with the 'hostile' meaning. If we take seriously Missuno's assertion that the *g*-form and the *h*-form were freely interchangeable in OE, with no corresponding semantic difference, then this process of differentiation would appear to have taken place "overnight", as it were, between the late OE records and the earliest ME records. But the reality is rather less strange: the *g*-form was already associated with the 'particolored' meaning and the *h*-form with the 'hostile' meaning in OE, as I explain in the next section.

Origin of the *g*-Form *fāg*

A quick scan of the entries in the *DOE* shows that the *g*-form predominates in *fāh* 2 'particolored', while the *h*-form predominates in *fāh* 1 'hostile'. For *fāh* 2 'particolored', the *DOE* lists these forms: *fah*, *fag*, *faag*, *fahne*, *fagne*; *fages*; *fagum*; *fage*, *fā* (Christ B, C), *faa* (Andreas); *fagum*; *fagan* (in the weak declension); note the high occurrence of *g*-forms. For *fāh* 1 'hostile', the *DOE* lists these forms: *fah*, *fag*; *fane* (*Beowulf*); *fagum*; *fa*, *faa* (Andreas); *fæ* (in a gloss); *fara*; *faum* (*Genesis A*); note the preponderance of *h*-forms, including back-formation from deleted *h* in the oblique cases. Although the evidence suggests a correlation between the *g*-form and the meaning 'particolored',¹² the editors of the *DOE* have been typically and appropriately conservative in writing the first headword of both *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2 with

¹¹ In support of what may otherwise seem a tendentious claim about back-formations being based on the inflected form of the adjective, I cite a comment by Lass (1992: 63): "*apparent* deletion of final [ç] as in *hi* 'high' beside *hiȝ* [in ME]" (emphasis added) may not actually show deletion; rather, such forms "may well descend from OE inflected forms like nom./acc. pl. *hēa*, where intervocalic /x/ has been lost".

¹² The editors of the *TOE* (Roberts and Kay 2000) seem to have recognized the correlations between the *g*-form and the 'particolored' meaning, and the *h*-form and the 'hostile' meaning: they have arranged all the senses associated with the 'particolored' meaning (*fāh* 2), including 'brightness, light' (3.01.12), 'darkness, obscurity' (3.01.13), 'a color; medley/variety of color; colored, multicolored' with the *g*-form, while the senses associated with the 'hostile' meaning (*fāh* 1), including 'bad feeling, sadness; hostility' (08.01.03.09) 'moral evil, depravity' (12.08.06.02.03), 'guiltiness, guilt' (12.08.09) are listed under the *h*-form.

the *h*-spelling. Most likely, they have done so based on comparative evidence from cognates of *fāh* in other Germanic languages, all of which demonstrate a reflex with /x/, e.g., Goth. *filu-faihs* ‘multicolored’, OS *fēh* ‘colored’, OHG *fēh* ‘colored’ and *gi-fēh* ‘hostile’, OFris. *fāch* ‘criminal’ (by ‘criminal’ Orel probably means ‘punishable’) (Orel s.v. **faixaz* I and **faixaz* II).

While the *DOE* entries demonstrate correlations between the *h*-form and the ‘hostile’ meaning, and between the *g*-form and the ‘particolored’ meaning, this distribution is not true in every instance. Even so, the OE evidence shows the beginnings of a process of differentiation that produced the ME reflexes *fo* and *foul* *faz* (and, later, *faw(e)*), as described above.

As the ME and EModE evidence testifies, *fāh* and *fāg* do not represent simple orthographic variants, but rather phonological differences realized and strengthened by speakers of OE and ME. The pronunciation of the two variants, *fāh* and *fāg*, is worth some consideration. Missuno states that there is no “phonological difference underlying the two spellings [*fāh* and *fāg*]; it has no more significance than, e.g., the variation *burh* : *burg*” (128, fn. 9). This statement requires amendment. First, the free variation between the word-final consonants in *burh/burg* is a result of optional devoicing of etymologically voiced **g* in late OE (as is the case for *burg*, from PGmc **burǝz*; Orel, s.v. **burǝz*). *Fāh*, on the other hand, is originally voiceless (from Gmc **faixaz*, cf. the OHG, ON and other cognates given above), and thus cannot be devoiced in word-final position.¹³ Moreover, there is no reason to believe that the relevant voicing change is, at this stage, a bidirectional process: the voiced velar fricative may become devoiced in word-final position, but an originally (that is, etymologically) voiceless word-final variant does not normally become voiced.¹⁴ The only way that the process of devoicing associated with *burh/burg* could have anything to do with the *fāh/fāg* variation is through analogy, and more specifically, through reanalysis: it is possible that speakers of (late) OE formed *fāg* as a voiced option to pair with the voiceless *fāh*, in what historically was the inverse of the *burh/burg* variation. This scenario is very unlikely, however.¹⁵

¹³ There is a possible counter-argument here, based on my postulation of a voiced variant **faizaz* as outlined below. The counter-argument would say that PGmc **faizaz*, which became OE *fāg* in the (OE) uninflected cases/numbers, was optionally devoiced to *fāh*. This would help explain why there is a preponderance of the *g*-form in inflected (word-medial) words, and very few occurrences of inflected word-forms based on *fāh* (which would lose word-medial *h* as according to regular OE sound change to produce forms like *fane*, *faum*, etc., though some forms with *h* intact survive, e.g., *fahne*). It is possible that such ‘devoicing’ of *fāg* may have played a role in the uneven distribution of *fag*- roots in inflected forms and *fah* in uninflected forms; but if so, it’s not really part of the same process that created the *burh/burg* variation. At any rate, the overwhelming comparative evidence of the cognate languages with reflexes deriving from **faixaz* as shown above makes it impossible that the only origin of the *h* is a devoicing of **faizaz*, so we are left with positing **faixaz* as the etymon for the reflexes found in the other Germanic languages and both **faixaz* and **faizaz* as etyma for the OE reflexes. Invoking the *burh/burg* variation does nothing for our argument, in other words.

¹⁴ See Lass (1994: 76) for a brief discussion of optional devoicing of the *burg/burh* type. He points out that this is a late OE phenomenon. For this reason, in addition to the etymological reasons stated above, optional devoicing cannot account for the variation between *fāg* and *fāh* in early records.

¹⁵ Admittedly, Hogg (1992b: 107) warns that because of how “unusual” the major changes of the OE phonemic system are in the period, the paradigms may well have demonstrated significant allomorphic variation.

One reason is that *fāg* is common in texts that are typically regarded as early, namely, *Beowulf* and *Genesis A*.¹⁶ This should not be the case if *fāg* were a much later analogical formation (unless we were to posit that the late tenth- or early eleventh-century scribes of the *Beowulf* and *Genesis* manuscripts altered the earlier *fāh* spellings for *fāg* spellings; but this does not fit the evidence, as I explain below). For another, *fāg-* as a stem is extremely common in the oblique cases, much more so than it is as an uninflected form.¹⁷ If *fāg* with a word-final voiced consonant is formed by analogy with *burg/burh*, why would it appear more commonly in word-medial position in inflected forms rather than in the nominative? The principle of Occam's Razor impels us to search for a solution other than analogy. The origin of the *fāg* variant, then, must be accounted for.

By far the most likely explanation for the *fāg* variant lies in the application of Verner's Law to a differently stressed variant of the etymon in pre-PGmc. PIE had an accentual system with variable placement in the word, and one of the major changes in the Germanic branch was its shift to word-initial stress.¹⁸ Before this shift in accent came the phonetic changes described in Grimm's Law and Verner's Law. After these sound changes, all words in early PGmc become stressed on the first syllable, causing the PIE contrastive accent placement to be lost, and phonemicizing the voicing distinction created by Verner's Law. *Fāh* and *fāg*, contributing to both lexemes *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2, derive from the (segmentally) homophonous PIE word-pair with two different stress patterns. As discussed above, PGmc **fāixaz* derives from the PIE root **peik-*, accented on the first syllable (the root). Through sound changes known as Grimm's Law, PIE palatal *k* yields Gmc [x] and thus **fāix-az*. However, if the accent did not fall on the root syllable in this case, the voiceless [x] would become voiced [ɣ] through Verner's Law. For this reason, the voiced fricative [ɣ] of OE *fāg* must derive from a Pre-PGmc **faiɣ-áz*, with the accent on the final syllable.¹⁹ Thus, two different stress accents were possible for o-grade formations from the PIE **peik-* root,²⁰ and these yield the phonetic forms *fāg* and *fāh*, an alternation seemingly unique to OE among the other Germanic languages that have a cognate of *fāh*.

Ultimately, while the source of *fāg* is not of primary concern in this etymological argument, its existence represents, like the existence of the homophonous lexemes *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2, an enduring diachrony with origins in PIE and reverberations well

¹⁶ Either Missuno was unaware that devoicing of word-final *g* was a late OE phenomenon, or he is implicitly aligning himself with the school of thought that dates *Beowulf* much later than traditionally held (i.e., roughly eighth century).

¹⁷ The uninflected forms only exist in the strong adjective declension, in these categories: masc. and fem. nom. sing., neu. nom./acc. sing./pl.

¹⁸ A good general overview of how OE fits into the larger Indo-European family is Bammesberger (1992). Ringe (2006) provides a thorough and approachable description of the linguistic changes between PIE and PGmc; see specifically §2.5.5 on the PIE accent system.

¹⁹ Orel lists a **faiɣaz* as the etymon of OE *fæge* 'doomed to die'. The relation between this **faiɣaz* and the **faiɣaz* I postulate above is disputed—see Orel s.v. *fæge*.

²⁰ The occurrence of segmentally homophonous lexemes with different stress accents and different meanings is not unusual in Indo-European, e.g., Ancient Greek *τομός, ῥή, ὄν, adj.* 'cutting, sharp' vs *τόμος, ο, n.* 'slice' (Liddell and Scott 1940). The alternation C6C(C)-o- : CoC(C)-6- was, apparently, a productive stem type in PIE.

into the sixteenth century, a matter of importance to philologists and lexicologists alike.

Semantics of *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2: Synchronic Evidence

Missuno says that the “crime/blood ambivalence also attends most of the *DOE*’s non-poetic evidence for *fāh* 1 in ways that show the semantic salience of the bloody associations” (129). He is right to draw attention to the fact that *fāh* appears many times in poetic contexts where the word seems to be drawing on the conceptual domains of both ‘hostile’ and ‘particolored’ (or one of the subdefinitions of *fāh* 2). As he points out, there are a number of specialized senses of *fāh* 2 listed in the *DOE* that appear to show a semantic overlap between the hostile meaning and the particolored meaning. For instance, under meaning 2.a. ‘discolored, stained, marked’ are listed subdefinitions like 2.a. ‘specifically: stained with blood,’ and 2.b. ‘specifically: stained with sins, etc., ? i.e., guilty’. But as the dictionary entry makes clear, these senses only appear in poetry and should not be used to ‘prove’ polysemy in the language as a whole. Further subdefinitions of *fāh* 2 include senses that are exclusive to poetry with martial themes like *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, and *Judith*: ‘bright, shining, gleaming; adorned; frequently of weapons’. It is not difficult to imagine that a sword that is ‘gleaming’ is also ‘bloodstained’ or ‘guilty’; and at times, it is nearly impossible not to think that the poet intentionally wove these meanings together.

For instance, a famous passage in *Judith* refers to the sword that Judith uses to kill Holofernes as *fāh*: “sloh ða wundenlocc / þone feondsceaðan fagum mece” (then the one with braided hair killed the hostile enemy with a ‘gleaming/stained/bloodstained’ sword; Griffith 1997: l. 103). Before these lines, Judith makes an impassioned plea to God to forgive her for using her sword to cut down Holofernes, for never before has she been more in need of God’s mercy (Nahte ic þinre næfre / miltse þon maran þearfe; Griffith 1997: ll. 91–92). Judith’s own actions constitute a kind of murder—she beheads Holofernes in his tent while he sleeps in a drunken stupor. The language of the passage maintains a tension between the righteousness of Judith’s actions on the one hand (she operates under the aegis of God’s favor) and the foulness of her actions on the other (she draws him near her ‘shamefully’, *bysmerlice*²¹). *Fāh* appears at a place in the poem, then, where it bears a multitude of implications, including stained with sin/guilt and gleaming with light or blood.

The explanation for the apparent association of *fāh* ‘particolored’ with *fāh* ‘hostile’ is not a result of actual polysemy, as the full diachronic linguistic evidence, including the ME and EModE forms, testifies, but can be seen as a result of association-based contamination, with the neutral meaning of *fāh* 1 ‘particolored’ being contaminated by the negative ‘hostile’ meaning, producing meanings like ‘stained (with blood, guilt, sin, etc.)’ that are outlined in the *DOE*. This is an

²¹ The *DOE* entry for *bysmor* reflects that that it has much the semantic range that PDE ‘shame’ has, and that it occurs in a wide range of contexts. In his translation of *Judith*, Fulk (2010: 307) chooses to translate *bysmerlic* as ‘insultingly’.

exclusively poetic phenomenon and, I argue, a case of conventionalized word-play. Missuno's exclusive attention to the poetic contexts allows for a bias in his results, namely, the apparent pervasiveness of semantic ambiguity between the 'hostile' meaning and the 'particolored' meaning. Outside of poetic contexts, and even sometimes inside of poetic contexts, *fāh* often has a neutral meaning of 'particolored'.

After the defeat of Grendel and Grendel's mother in *Beowulf*, Hrothgar gives a saddle to the now-victorious *Beowulf*, which is described as "sadol searwum fah, since gewurpad / þæt wæs hildesetl heahcyninges" (a saddle decorated/particolored with adornments, made glorious by treasure; that was a hero's seat) (Fulk et al. 2008: ll.1038–39). In this case, the saddle represents a glorious gift of the highest quality given by a grateful Hrothgar. The saddle would probably not be 'stained' or 'guilty' in any real sense, other than the possible general association of war gear being metaphorically 'stained' by its association with violence. But as *Beowulf* is a rather martial poem, it would be difficult not to detect overtones of 'hostility' when one looks for them.

Missuno is right to point out the significant number of instances where there is semantic overlap between *fāh* 1 'hostile' and *fāh* 2 'multicolored', both pertaining to those instances of *fāh* that the *DOE* specifically calls "ambiguous" as well as other cases that dictionaries and glossaries have traditionally ascribed to either *fāh* 1 or *fāh* 2. His exploration of that semantic interplay and the typical collocations of *fāh* with swords, treasure, and serpents is a necessary and productive analysis of *fāh*'s contextual usage. However, Missuno's assertion that *fāh* 2 'particolored' has been fully integrated into *fāh* 1 'hostile' requires amendment. Certainly, there are instances where *fah* 2 is clearly meant, and there is no association with *fah* 1 'hostility'. For instance, the eponymous bird of *The Phoenix* is described as "fæger forweard hiwe, / bleobrygdum fæg ymb þa breost foran" (on the front, fair in form, variegated in colors around the forward breast) (Krapp and Dobbie 1936: l. 291). The poem is a translation and adaptation of Lactantius' *Carmen de ave phoenix*; the passage in question translates Latin "humeri pectusque decens uelamine fulget" (the shoulders and breast shine with a pleasing covering; 1893: l.120). Thus, *fæg* here does not gloss anything that might be deemed hostile or stained. Moreover, the phoenix is a type of Christ, a beautiful and unearthly creature that dies and rises again; it would be reading against the grain to find any hint of *fāh* 1 in this occurrence. *The Phoenix* is not traditionally ascribed to an early date,²² so the occurrence of *fāh* 1 here cannot be dismissed as a fossil from pre- or early OE.

Similar to the description of the phoenix, an anonymous homily writer describes birds as variegated in color and beautiful in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 198: "fugas ealle fægere and fage... fenix gretað" (all the birds, beautiful and particolored... greeted the phoenix) (Kluge 1885: l. 53). Examples from the other prose sources confirm the existence of a totally independent, neutral meaning for *fāh* 2: in *Leechbook I* we find a recipe calling for ram's gall of variegated color as an

²² Fulk (1992) treats *The Phoenix* in Appendix A (pp. 402–404). Based on the level of parasitic vowels (e.g., intrusion of *o* in OE *hleahtr* < Gmc **hlahtr*) contained in *The Phoenix*, he posits that the poem was written sometime after Cynewulf's oeuvre, which is widely attributed to the ninth century. See also Cable (1981: 80) for a rough diachronic outline of the dates traditionally ascribed to OE poetry.

ingredient (wiþ wrymum... ramgeallan þone *fagan* cnua on niwe ealo; Cockayne 1865: 51.1.1). In *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, the narrator describes a pestilential cloud in this way: “þa æteowde þær wolberende lyft hwites hiowes, and eac missenlices wæs heo on hringwisan *fag*” (there appeared a pestilential cloud of bright aspect, and it was patterned in places with ring shapes; “on hringwisan *fag*” glosses Lat. “*candido uersecolore*”).²³ Again, these are not considered “early” or particularly linguistically conservative texts.

In support of the synchronic case for *fāh* 2 ‘particolored’ existing as a separate lexeme in the minds of speakers, we have a number of derived forms²⁴ that descend from the ‘particolored’ meaning, including *fāhnes* ‘variety of color, variegation’, another noun formation *fāgung* ‘a variety (of color)’, a weak verb *fāgian* ‘to vary; to change color’ and its past participle *gefagod* ‘of varied color; adorned, gleaming’, and a single occurrence of the word *fāgettung* ‘changing of color’.²⁵ There also appears *fāhrift/fāgrift* ‘dyed curtain’,²⁶ and the word *fāhwyrmlfāgwyrms* glosses the Greco-Latin ‘basilisk’ (literally, a large serpent of variegated color) in the *Vespasian Psalter*. Like *fāh* 2 meaning ‘particolored; stained (by sin)’, *fāhnes* can mean ‘variety of color’ and secondarily, ‘a discoloration of the skin; blemish, ulceration’ (*DOE*, s.v. 2.). Thus, the semantic range of *fāhnes* is very much like that of *fāh* 2, but without the highly atomized definitions drawn from poetry that associate the word with gore and blood.

Although accounting for productivity of affixes is difficult in modern languages, and even more so with a historical stage of the language that has left relatively few textual records as OE has,²⁷ the suffix *-nes* seems to have been fairly productive, in

²³ OE and Latin from Orchard (1995: §21). I depart from both Orchard (1995) and Fulk (2010) in the translation of *hwites hiowes* as it seems to me *hiowe* does not mean ‘hue’ but rather ‘shape, form’.

²⁴ Missuno acknowledges the derived forms *fagian* and *fāgettun*, claiming that they “can express darkening of weather”. But this reading ignores the main meanings of these words, namely, “to change color” and “a changing of color”, which are clearly derived from *fāh* 2 ‘particolored’. Missuno states that all the examples of *fāh* glossing Latin words relating to color and light, as well as the evidence of the derived forms, “should not be uncritically extended and generalized to the poetic occurrences, which are far more numerous” (130). By this, he seems to mean that these glosses and derived words should not impact our semantic reconstruction of *fāh*, whether we reconstruct one word or two. But I argue that it is not a matter of “extending and generalizing,” but rather, building a complete picture of the lexical status of the word(s) using the whole evidence available to us. Only then can we proceed to make a judgement on the semantics of the word(s) in a specialized context (poetry).

²⁵ *DOE* s.vv. *fāhnes*, *fāgung*, *fāgian*, *gefagod*, *fāgettung*.

²⁶ This appears only in a gloss to Esther 1.6: “et pendebant ex omni parte tentoria aerii coloris et carpasini et hyacinthini” (and there were hung up on every side dyed curtains of sky color and green and violet; Steinmeyer and Sievers 1879: v.1, 488 a.2—3).

²⁷ Kastovsky (1992: 357) reminds us that “there is no way of testing productivity directly” and that we have only circumstantial evidence for arguing about productivity. He lists the circumstantial evidence as “the number of new formations occurring in texts of a given period, their semantic quality (i.e. their semantic regularity homogeneity, degree of lexicalization), the correlation of morphophonemic alternations with the overall morphophonemic system operating also in inflexion... or continued productivity in subsequent periods”. After taking these factors into consideration, they “give us a reasonably good indication as to whether a pattern was productive or not” but nothing more. It also bears reminding that ‘productivity’ is a spectrum with ‘more productive’ forms at one end and ‘least productive’ forms on the other.

OE as it is in PDE.²⁸ As such, the semantics of the derived form are likely not to stray too far from the semantics of the stem.²⁹ Similarly, the *-ung* suffix of *fāgung* was a productive nominalizing suffix,³⁰ and the stem it attaches to generally has very similar semantics to the bare stem. In other words, lexemes bearing less productive affixes are more likely to have a meaning that diverges from the stem's etymological meaning; the divergent meaning with the non-productive affix would then be lexicalized. *Fāhnes* and *fāgung* have productive enough suffixes that they could have even been produced in ad hoc environments. Nor are these derived forms limited to the early period, as Missuno implies, and as his argument implicitly requires: *fāhnes* appears, for instance, in glosses to Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* in MS Brussels, Royal 1650 and Ælfric's *Homilies*, each datable to the early decades of the eleventh century. This is ample evidence that *fāh* 2 survived and even thrived in synchronic (late) OE literate contexts.

Literary Conclusions

The diachronic evidence (*fāh*'s existence as two separate lexemes in early Gmc and two separate lexemes in ME) and the synchronic evidence (*fāh* as two separate, homophonous lexemes in OE prose) strongly support the view of *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2 as separate lexemes throughout the Old English period, in both prose and poetry, contrary to Missuno's argument for a single, polysemous lexeme. Despite his misapprehensions of the lexical status of *fāh* for the Old English speaker, Missuno is correct in his literary interpretation of *fāh* as the nexus of a sophisticated web associating guilt, hostility, and slaughter with decorated treasure, gold, and patterned objects. In fact, Missuno's argument about the associations between shining gold and bloody violence in the poetry is strengthened by the acknowledgment that *fāh* did constitute two separate lexemes for the historical speaker of the language. I argue that *fāh*'s sophisticated semantics in poetry is an example of

²⁸ Kastovsky (1992: 360, 408) laments the lack of a comprehensive treatment of OE word formation. However, he does list a number of what might be called 'productive' nominal suffixes, and here he includes *-nes* and *-ungl-ing*. Of *-nes(s)* he states that it is "used very frequently to derive feminine, mainly abstract, nouns from adjectives and verbs", including *beorhtnes* 'brightness', *biterness* 'bitterness', *clænness* 'purity' and 29 more. In none of the examples he cites does the semantics of the derived form depart from the semantics of the stem.

²⁹ Despite the difficulties of 'ranking' productiveness, linguists typically agree that productivity of an affix does impact the way a person accesses the word-form containing that affix in their mental lexicon. Specifically, Zimmer (1964) posits that members of the productive morphological classes like *-ness* are not stored individually in the speaker's mental lexicon as are the members of unproductive classes, but rather are created as needed and discarded. Anshen and Aronoff (1999) provide a helpful discussion of how a person's mental lexicon may access and discard morphological classes. Building on Zimmer's argument, they reason that if words containing a productive morpheme are typically not stored but individually generated, then we should not expect members of this morphological class to have "idiosyncratic meaning," since "any idiosyncrasies must be stored in order to be retained". They name specifically the suffix *-ness* as being productive, and thus "words ending in this suffix should not be listed in speakers' mental lexicons" (18–19).

³⁰ Kastovsky (1992: 388) states that the *-ung* suffix forms deverbal nouns, primarily from weak class 2 verbs (the category to which *fāgian* 'to vary' belongs).

conventionalized word-play, in which the authors and audiences understand that both meanings are being invoked in almost any given context in heroic poetry.

The matter of OE poetic formulae has become a vast sub-disciplinary endeavor in its own right, bringing the early Lord and Parry oral-formulaic theory (now much modified) into Anglo-Saxon mainstream.³¹ No serious scholar now debates the existence of poetic formulae in OE verse, though the extent of the presence, repetition, and borrowing of formulae from one poem to the next—and moreover, what that presence signifies in terms of the “orality” vs. “literariness” of a given poem—is subject to on-going discussion. We accept that there existed in OE poetry conventionalized words and phrases (the formula), and conventionalized lexical meaning (special semantics of certain words when used in poetry, e.g., OE *synn* in poetry meaning ‘hostility’ but ‘sin’ in prose; Cronan (2003) posits 42 such words). OE poetic language is, after all, highly conventional. It is not much of a stretch to posit that interplay between the meanings of *fāh* 1 ‘hostile’ and *fāh* 2 ‘particolored’ could also have been conventionalized.

Relatively little has been written on conventionalized word-play on homophonous pairs in OE poetry. This is not too surprising, as OE has very few homophonous lexemes with distinct meanings.³² Frank (1972) pointed out the paucity of work on word-play in poetry, and her work broke significant ground in this regard.³³ She argues that word-play, either of the paronomasia type or the ambiguum type, appears widely in OE poetry, especially scriptural verse, because of its use as a linguistic token of Christian teachings. For instance, in Cynewulf’s oeuvre, a play on *rod* (‘cross’) and *rodor(-)* (‘heaven’) uses “phonological coincidence” to “outline a basic Christian paradox”: that a lowly thing like the cross should have the “highest” place in the Divine work of salvation (210). In Old Testament poetry, repeated paronomasia can “function as a kind of typological ‘punctuation,’ quietly pinpointing the moments at which pre-Christian history was a shadow, a figure, of events to come” (211). Orchard (2009) also treats cases of word-play in *The Dream of the Rood*, examining instances of phonic association in words like *beswyled* (l. 23a, from *beswyllan* ‘to soak, drench’) and *besyllian* (‘to sully, defile; stain, soil’); between homographs *stefn* (‘trunk, root’) and *stefn* (‘voice’); and in the two meanings of *beam* (‘wooden beam’ and ‘ray of light’) (229). He takes as a given that *fāh* has great potential for word-play, as he states, “*fāh* appears to play on the twin meanings ‘stained’ and ‘guilty,’ a pun widespread in Old English literature” (229). In short, he emphasizes that there are so many “possibilities for felicitous ambiguity built into the

³¹ An excellent summary and chronology of the development of the oral-formulaic theory can be found in Katherine O’Brien O’Keefe’s ‘Diction, Variation, and the Formula’ in *A Beowulf Handbook* (1997: 85–104).

³² One homophone that would have been fairly common in poetry is that of *ealdor* ‘life’ and *ealdor* ‘elder’. Far more common were near homophones. For instance, *symbol* ‘feast’ (from Gmc **sumlan*) and *simble* ‘always’ (from Gmc **semlēn* **semlai*) may have been homophonous in the later OE period when rounding of *y* [Y] began to diminish, causing it to merge with *i* and the diphthong *ie* in West Saxon. Some words that are orthographically identical but would not have been true homophones because of vowel length include *gāst* ‘spirit’ and *gæst* ‘stranger’, *māga* ‘kinsman’ and *maga* ‘son’.

³³ Drawing on Holst (1925), Frank distinguishes between *paronomasia*, word-play based on an etymological relationship of words, whether real or perceived, and *ambiguum*, word-play based on the connection between two meanings of a single word (208).

fabric of [the poem] that it seems likely that the poet is consciously exploiting such *double entendres* for artistic effect... inviting his audience to make connections and identifications that deepen an already rich text” (230). What is true for *The Dream of the Rood*—and for scriptural poetry—can be usefully extended to a wide range of OE poetry in the specific lexemes of *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2.

We have a number of examples of this kind of conventionalized word-play on homophones and homonyms in modern poetry, and I turn now to one early seventeenth-century poet as an illustrative example. John Donne employs a number of well-known paronomasia in his poetry. Foremost amongst his word-play of homophonous (and for the era in which he writes, often homographic) word pairs is that of ‘sunne’ and ‘son(ne)’. For Donne, a metaphysical poet grappling with the connection between the earthly and the Christian divine, the word pair occasions a link between the physical sun and Christ, who is both son of God and God Himself. The associative link is often created indirectly by referring to shared literal or metaphorical attributes of the sun and the Son, e.g., references to shining light, scattering darkness, giving life and growth, etc. In ‘A Hymn to God the Father’, *sonne* refers to Christ but alludes to the physical sun by use of the word *shine*: “Swear by thyself, that at my death thy sonne / Shall shine as hee shines now, and heretofore”.³⁴ A line from his *Holy Sonnets* demonstrates the same wordplay, and again the connection between sun and Son is the metaphorical extension of “shining” to the Son: “I am thy *sonne*, made with thyself to shine”.³⁵ In both of these contexts, the word *sonne* is meant to represent both meanings, sun and son, simultaneously, drawing on the associative domains of each word to create a new and greater whole. Syntactically, semantically, and phonically, *sonne* could be either ‘son’ or ‘sun’, just as is the case with poetic occurrences of *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2. Clearly, the reader is not meant to choose one definition over another; rather, both meanings are to be invoked and associated in the reader’s mind in the given poetic context. The meaning differences between son and sun are distinct, and we imagine that the seventeenth-century reader of Donne’s poetry was just as capable as we are today of recognizing the productive associations between the two distinct lexemes. For similar reasons, it is not difficult to imagine that a speaker of OE would have readily recognized the wordplay of distinct lexemes *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2.

Another wordplay in Donne’s ‘A Hymn to God the Father’ may serve to illustrate a further point on the poetic associations of *fāh*. In the poem, Donne plays on two distinct meanings of the word *do*, specifically in the past participle form *done*. Consider these lines from stanza 1:

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were *done* before?
Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And *do* run still, though still I *do* deplore?
When thou hast *done*, thou hast not *done*,
For I have more.
(ll. 1–6, italics added)

³⁴ Donne (1994: 387.15–16). Grierson’s (1912: 99) commentary on this wordplay is a useful reference guide.

³⁵ Donne (1994: 340.II.5).

The word *do*, for Donne and other EModE speakers, was even more complex a polysemous lexeme than it is for PDE speakers: many archaic uses of *do* were still available for EModE speakers, such as *do* as a transitive main verb meaning ‘To put, place’.³⁶ In line 4, *do* is used twice as an emphatic *do* (*OED* I.32.d), drawing attention to the continuous nature of the speaker’s sins (“through which I run / And *do* run still”), and his continuous distaste for those sins (“still *do* I deplore”). In line 5, Donne draws on two more meanings of *do* different from that of emphatic auxiliary. The speaker calls out to the Lord and says “When thou hast *done*”, by which he means ‘when you have *done* the earlier action, i.e., forgiven the sin’ (drawing on meaning I.4.a “To perform, execute”). In the second half of the line, he plays on yet another meaning of *do*, i.e., “to make an end, conclude” (*OED* I.10.b. (a)), saying “thou hast not *done*”. The Lord has not finished his work of forgiveness, in other words, because the speaker will continue to commit sins that the Lord must forgive. This play on three meanings of the word *do* occurs, in the same pattern and with the same emphatic force described above, in each of the three stanzas of the poem. It is likely that the play on the three meanings of the word *do* would have been nearly as obvious to seventeenth-century readers of the poem as the wordplay on *son/sun*.

I describe the polysemy of *do* in Donne’s poetry as an illustrative parallel to Missuno’s argument about the polysemy of *fāh* in OE poetry. It is likely that a reader of Donne’s poetry would not have distinguished the kind of word-play taking place in *son/sun* from that of the three meanings of *done*. In Missuno’s defense, it is difficult if not impossible to extrapolate from a single genre (poetry) belonging to a relatively short synchronic stage of a language whether a word is polysemous or homophonous. And it may be that, for the speaker of OE, the experience of encountering the word *fāh* in, say, *Beowulf* could have resembled either the *son/sun* pair above (homophonous lexemes) or the three senses of *done* (one polysemous lexeme). After all, the linguist’s decision to call a word one lexeme or two is largely based on transhistorical (that is to say, etymological) and theoretical constraints; to that extent, the judgment call on a word’s lexical status is something of a philosophical ideal. The ‘ideal’ speaker of OE (so to speak: we cannot account for every speaker) may have understood *fāh* as one word or as two. We cannot fully answer that question because we do not have a living speaker to ask. And an investigation into Anglo-Saxon attitudes about philology and etymology would be a very different enterprise altogether. But because of the deep diachronic evidence—stretching from PIE to the present day—and because of the synchronic evidence of the survival of *fāh* 2 ‘particolored’ (contrary to Missuno’s claim), we have good reason to believe that the two meanings of *fāh* were distinct, yet available, for the reader of OE poetry.

The contexts in *Beowulf* that the *DOE* and, to a greater extent, Missuno, point to as ‘intentionally ambiguous’ between *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2 must be ‘ambiguous’ because of a conscious choice on the part of the poet. The careful employment of *fāh* in contexts that can be understood with either meaning are the result of a careful

³⁶ *OED* s.v. *do* I.1.a. This meaning is the earliest attested one, first appearing in the early OE of the Alfredian translation of Gregory’s *Pastoral Care*, traditionally assumed to be written 871 × 899. This use of *do* is last recorded in the nineteenth century; the *OED* claims this use is now regional and rare.

coalescence of the word meaning ‘particolored’ and the word meaning ‘hostile’. This coalescence does exactly the work Missuno says it does—it creates associative links between evil/blood and the shining splendor of weapons; between variegated serpents and decorated swords; between the bloody violence used to attain gold and treasure, and the gold and treasure itself. But I think our understanding of that signification is enriched by a proper understanding of the lexical status of *fāh* 1 and *fāh* 2 in OE; for if the two words really are distinct lexemes and would have been perceived as such by a native speaker, then the OE poet and the poetic audience must have recognized the conventionalized associations called up by the ‘ambiguous’ uses of the word *fāh*.

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