

“Denne Gaade er godt gjort”: Grundtvig’s encounter with the riddles of the Exeter Book

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Grundtvig’s engagement with Anglo-Saxon literary culture entered an intensive phase in the period around his England-visits (1829-31) when, intending their publication, he transcribed the poetic contents of a codex preserved from Exeter’s eleventh-century monastic library. Given the fundamental role of the symbolic and the metaphorical in Grundtvig’s writings and in his projection of his own identity it becomes interesting to examine his tentative handling of the hundred riddles contained in the codex, which involved him in the intellectual strategies of enigmatic statement and solution, literary devices such as the ‘I-voice’ and the kenning, the cryptic use of runes and motifs from folklore. The significance of his reception of this early medieval northern Christian culture doubtless extends to – but also further than – his mythological writings. Intellectual engagement with the enigmatic bridges secular and religious for Grundtvig, as it did for the Anglo-Saxon monks of Exeter.

The study of Grundtvig’s exposition of the northern myths, particularly in the two ambitious works, *Nordens Mytologi* (1808) and *Nordens Mythologi* (1832), may of course be approached in a variety of ways. Both involved him in considerable feats of story-telling, thus the study of his narratorial methods in the respective works rightly commands attention. But despite the suggestion on the 1832 title page that this is a second, reworked edition of the volume from 1808, it is to all intents and purposes a new work, with premisses and objectives quite different from those of 1808; and, accordingly, its title *Nordens Mythologi eller Sindbilled-Sprog* [Mythology or Figurative Language of the North] emphasises a priority other than the simple retelling of ancient narrative. ‘*Sindbilled-Sprog*’ [figurative language] is Grundtvig’s Danish alternative to the Greek-derived word ‘*Mythologi*’¹ but the term also usefully signals the distinctive approach he now took to northern myth, in regarding it as a symbolic or metaphorical and more or less arcane mode of statement. The myths were to be construed (by those with sufficient insight) in conformity with the greater, universal and Christian-consistent truths they were assumed to intimate (knowingly or intuitively). This purpose is proclaimed in the phrasing of the subtitle “[...] *Sindbilled-Sprog* historisk-poetisk udviklet og oplyst” [figurative language, historically-poetically set forth and elucidated]. The language of northern myth would then again become an available native resource, a symbolic language charged

with meaning drawn from allusion to the ancient narratives, available for use in new discourse, formal and informal, poetry and prose, alongside the other great resources of symbolic or metaphorical reference in western cultural tradition, such as Greek and Roman myth and legend, and the Christian Scriptures.

“*Billed-Sprog* is what you call it when, by the names of animals, birds, trees and all kinds of visible things are meant not those things themselves but something invisible and spiritual which they are thought to resemble and in some way answer to,” wrote Grundtvig in his *Krønike-Rim til levende Skolebrug* (1842).²

In the history of western culture, in philosophy, theology, literature and art, particularly from the emergence of neo-Platonism onwards, the perception of one thing as standing for something other than itself, has often been based on underlying metaphysical assumptions about the absolute connection between outward forms and an inner truth. In Grundtvig’s case, various contexts can be adopted for the study of his stance on the symbolic and metaphorical: for example, the context of contemporary Romantic philosophy and literature, or that of psychology.³ Given his manifest interest in the literature of the European Middle Ages,⁴ it also seems proper, in this present study, to look at his engagement – a lifelong series of intermittent encounters and exchanges, directly and indirectly, through his own work and through that of associates and friends – with early medieval literary forms and the theory and mental habits behind them; and in particular his encounter with the poetic riddles of the Anglo-Saxon Exeter Book which may well have contributed something to the distinctive cast of his own poetic-creative mind and its chosen language of expression, and to the position he took up, in systematically construing symbolic meaning from the traditional narratives of Northern myth.⁵ At the same time, the inquiry into this encounter adds to the evaluation of the major example of the remarkable nineteenth-century reception of Anglo-Saxon cultural studies which Grundtvig’s engagement represents.

Fascicule 316, nos. 1-8, in the Grundtvig Archive in the Royal Library, Copenhagen, contain Grundtvig’s largely unpublished transcriptions of the eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon Exeter Book, one of the four surviving major collections of poetry written in Old English.⁶ This manuscript codex he first saw, and began to transcribe, in 1830 on a special visit to its ancient home in the library of Exeter Cathedral where it had been deposited by the first Bishop of Exeter, Leofric (died 1072). In that same year Grundtvig entered into a verbal agreement with the London booksellers Black, Young & Young to

invite public subscriptions to the printing, under his editorship, of the most important Anglo-Saxon manuscripts including the Exeter Book; but on returning to London in the summer of 1831 he found the publishers, under half-covert pressure from the antiquarian establishment in London, anxious to back out of the arrangement and indeed already advanced upon the promotion of a rival project under the editorship of Benjamin Thorpe (1782-1870).⁷

By this time, the codex had been conveyed to London for study and copying by English scholars (partly provoked by Grundtvig's interest in it), and Grundtvig was able to consult it, and to check his own readings against the official transcription, in the British Museum.⁸ Undeflected by all this English deviousness, he continued to work upon his transcriptions with an eye to publishing them in Denmark. Perhaps to the greater benefit of posterity, however, other major undertakings – not least his monumental *Nordens Mythologi* of 1832 – preoccupied Grundtvig in the eighteen-thirties. Nevertheless, when in 1842 Thorpe brought to completion and published his rival edition of the *Codex Exoniensis* (the Exeter Book), Grundtvig remained dedicated enough to check his own text against Thorpe's and to make many notes, in effect absorbing much of Thorpe's work into his own.⁹ From time to time, he took opportunities to mention in public his hope of finding the financial support needed to enable him to complete the great undertaking; but he never did manage to publish his edition of the Exeter Book.¹⁰ However, the scholarly Ludvig Christian Müller (1806-51) published *Collectanea Anglo-Saxonica* (Copenhagen 1835), a selection of symbol-rich Anglo-Saxon poetic texts based on Grundtvig's transcriptions and edited under Grundtvig's direct supervision (Bradley 1998, 25, footnote 43); and in 1840 Grundtvig himself pipped Thorpe to the post on at least one major text from the codex by publishing the allegorical poem on the phoenix-myth, *Phenix-Fuglen. Et angelsachsisk Kvad. Førstegang udgivet med Indledning, Fordanskning og Efterklang* [The Phoenix. An Anglo-Saxon poem. For the first time published, with introduction, Danish version and afterword].

Though he never succeeded in bringing to fruition his editorial ambition, there is much evidence to show that he absorbed and turned to good use a great deal from his long-extended and analytic engagement with this body of poetry, so much of which, in its poetic language as well as in its content, depends upon the capacity of its audience fruitfully to construe the symbolic, the figurative, the Christian-mythical.

Not least, one might expect him to have gained much from his intellectual and aesthetic engagement with the early medieval riddling

verse of the Anglo-Saxon poets. His temporary preoccupation with this ancient northern tradition of riddling coincides, in fact, with his work on the mythology (“or figurative language”) of the North which essentially rests upon treating the language of myth as a language of metaphor – often enigmatically obscure metaphor whose meaning is not immediately obvious to all and therefore calls upon the construing insights of the gifted interpreter.

Even if there is considerable difference in scale, there is a close affinity of intellectual procedure – and therefore the opportunity for intellectual cross-fertilisation – between such construing of myth and the construing of riddle. Significantly, in the poem which forms part of the introduction to *Nordens Mythologi* (1832), *Rim-Brev til Nordiske Paarørende* [Verse epistle to Nordic relatives], Grundtvig calls the Danish language, and especially the language as used in poetry, *Rune-Maalet* (*Rim-Brev* 29).¹¹ The word is derived from the Old Norse term *rúnamál* [rune-speech]. Thereby he seems to be calculatedly drawing attention not only to the heroic antiquity of the Danish language but (as he sees it) to its ancient inherent powers as a language of incantation, enigma, invocation and commemoration; above all, as the medium full of latent near-mystical potential to articulate the deepest insights of the Danish national spirit. For Old Norse *rún* means both ‘runic character’ and ‘mystery, secret lore’ (as does *rūn* in Old English) and sometimes the allusion of *Rune-* in the term *Rune-Maal* is not so much to the ancient writing-system of the runic alphabet itself, as to this complementary sense of a ‘secret lore’ which the *Rune-Maal* veils in figurative idiom and enigmatic language – a secret lore which even the poet voicing the words may not previously have known in an empirical sense.

This *Rune-Maal* is the guarantor of the truth he asserts in this prefatory poem: that there is “Mere i Myther end Æventyr” [more in myths than fairy-tales] (*Rim-Brev* 103). It is, of its nature, a language ideally apt to give expression to the symbolic truths lying enigmatically hidden in the myths of the northern peoples. In handling the riddles of the Exeter Book, therefore, Grundtvig was no doubt exercising that construing mentality upon which depended his whole current approach to northern mythology – and arguably very much more. Lundgreen-Nielsen, pointing to the year 1819 as a turning-point in Grundtvig’s definition of his inner poetic self and of his sense of mission as a writer, says of it: “Grundtvig quits the world of modern literature after having extricated its most distinctive means of recognition, the symbol, from a predominantly composition-orientated artistic context in order to use it in his everyday work” (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1980, 895). Grundtvig defines for himself, for his own person,

a kind of symbolic value “as a cipher for something that is greater than his biographical record and his private existence (which is probably what most poets centre themselves upon).”¹² Thereafter, “He fills his whole life and gives it effective power with his symbolic value” (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1980, 895).¹³

Grundtvig was neither the first nor the last writer to construct through his writings a persona which served as a kind of guarantor of the *bona fide* integrity of whatever truths were proposed in the discourse concerned; but it would be a mistake to think that Grundtvig's projection of himself as a symbol or cipher (Danish *selvsymbolik*) – remarkable though it is as a functioning literary device – was no more than a literary device. To speak of this projection as holding true for his real life outside the boundaries of a literary composition is not, in the case of Grundtvig, to slip into the familiar error of the autobiographical fallacy: supporting evidence is to be found across the spectrum of his real-life involvements, and is attested among those around him.¹⁴ Recognition of the *selvsymbolik* in Grundtvig is an important aspect of the Danish ‘history of mentalities’ – and Grundtvig's transcriptions and comments on the riddles, as well as illustrating his technical competence in dealing with the ancient verse forms, comprise an illuminating, even if minor, part of the record of that fundamentally symbol-orientated mentality in action.

It has to be acknowledged from the outset that the body of evidence for this enquiry is limited in scope and fragmentary in character. Grundtvig appears to have carried out the initial transcriptions of the riddles as part of his sequential copying of the whole poetic contents of the Exeter Book in 1830 and 1831.¹⁵ It may safely be assumed that the process of transcribing an ancient handwritten manuscript inevitably entailed much more than mere mechanical copying. Frequent practical judgments had to be made concerning the integrity of the text being copied, and such judgments could rarely have been made without understanding what the words meant. It can be assumed that Grundtvig was also eager to know as soon as possible what treasures might await discovery in this ancient storehouse of northern poetry. His first-hand engagement with the literary culture embodied in the Exeter Book begins, then, in 1830.¹⁶

At some time in or after 1842 he returned to the same sheaf of papers and compared his transcriptions with the edited texts of Thorpe's *Codex Exoniensis* (1842). It appears to be at this stage that he wrote in most of the various annotations which provide clues as to the intellectual address he made to the Anglo-Saxon riddles. Perhaps the most important testimony to his engagement with this particular genre

among the Exeter Book poems is the list of riddle titles or solutions which appears, apparently as an insertion into an originally blank space in the transcriptions, on pages 95v and 96r (the list is repeated, with the addition of one further solution, on p. 122v).¹⁷ Whereas Thorpe confessed himself baffled by these Anglo-Saxon enigmas and ventured few solutions, Grundtvig has spent what must have been a very considerable amount of time wrestling with their semantic ambiguities and ambivalences, their metaphorical mode, and the poets' teasing obfuscations and red herrings, in order to arrive at his list of solutions, grouped as firm or dubious. Frustratingly, however, he did not write out his translations of the Old English texts which would have revealed in far greater detail by what processes of interpretation and reasoning he reached the various solutions he proposed. Nor did he get as far as drafting any substantial apparatus such as would be required for a published edition of the texts. We have to make do with the clues we have – but it may be thought that they are sufficient to persuade us that Grundtvig in this undertaking engaged quite extensively with the early medieval literary culture of the riddle and its characteristic habits of mind.

The transcribing and editing of the raw text found in the Exeter manuscript involved various technical skills. For example, the Anglo-Saxon scribe did not give each separate line of poetry a new line in the manuscript, but instead filled the page margin to margin just as though the text were prose: Grundtvig therefore had the task of identifying the boundaries of each poetic line. Old English poetry was composed in the northern alliterative tradition in which Grundtvig already had some expertise by virtue of his reading in Old Icelandic poetry, so broadly speaking he experienced little difficulty with scanning the Old English line.¹⁸ But other editorial tasks were less routine – among them, that of penetrating the meaning of the poetic riddles (or 'enigmas' as Thorpe sometimes called them, after the Latin term *ænigma* – plural *ænigmata* – 'riddle'), numbering nearly one hundred, gathered into the codex by its Anglo-Saxon compiler and recorded there without titles or formal solutions, and sometimes with uncertain boundaries between one text and another.¹⁹

Here it is appropriate to recall that Grundtvig was a pioneer in the analysis of this codex. While modern editors have the benefit of generations of scholarly discussion of line divisions, textual boundaries, textual emendations, riddle solutions and so on, Grundtvig was venturing upon what was more or less virgin territory. Taking this into account, one has to admire – here, just as in his pioneering work (1815-20) on the text of *Beowulf* of which he had not at that time even

seen the original manuscript – his grasp of Anglo-Saxon poetics and the ambitiousness of his undertaking. However, just as he brought to the task a certain familiarity with the scansion of the ancient northern verse-line, so too he brought with him some foreknowledge of the enigmatic genre within northern tradition. There were verse riddles in the Old Icelandic literature with which he was well familiar by this date. The bulk of them occurs in *Heiðreks saga*, in the form of Gestumblindi's *gátur*; and incidentally, the fact that Gestumblindi is actually Odin in disguise serves as a convenient reminder that in the northern world riddling was anciently perceived as an established form of discourse, of interrogation or testing, between gods and men.²⁰

Of course, the riddle-genre is found worldwide and is at least as old as the stories of Oedipus and Samson, and some of the riddles in *Heiðreks saga* and in the Exeter Book are of this widespread and traditional sort. While some of the Anglo-Saxon riddles are quite learned and serious, with an ancestry going back to the *aenigmata* of late Latin culture and a background in scientific and patristic writings – for example, Riddles 1-3²¹ on the phenomenon 'Wind' have possible sources in Pliny's *Historia naturalis*, Lucretius' *De natura rerum*, Isidore of Seville's *De natura rerum*, and Bede's *De natura rerum* (Muir 1994, II, 616) – others have more popular and frivolous character, such as Riddles 25, 42, 44, 45 which rest upon sexual innuendo and fairly certainly bear witness to the currency of riddles within the English native oral folk culture.

A sample from the list of solutions Grundtvig assigned to them²² clearly indicates what cultural contexts he himself assumed the well-spring of the Exeter Book riddles to be: *Solen* [Sun], *Maanen i Næde* [The moon in the *interlunium*], *Daggryet* [Dawn], *Vinden* [Wind], *Lynilden* [Lightning]; *Vidien* [Withy, Osier], *Sæde-Kornet* [Seed corn], *Brød-Kornet* [Bread-corn], *Den plöiede Mark og Sædemanden* [Ploughed field and sower], *Lögen* [Onion],²³ *Ko-Huden* [Cow-hide], *6 Vædre og 4 Faar nyklippede* [Six rams and four ewes newly shorn], *Ploven* [Plough], *Harven* [Harrow], *Sømmet i en Hestesko* [Nail in a horseshoe], *Bien* [Bee], *En Myg-Sværme*²⁴ [A swarm of midges]; *Moder-Naturen* [Maternal nature], *Arnen* [Hearth], *Ild-Tangen* [Fire tongs], *Laas og Nögel* [Lock and key], *Brönd-Vippen* [Well-sweep], *Tærskeloen* [Threshing-room]; *Klokke-Knebelen* [Bell-clapper], *Brude-Blus* [Light borne before bridal couple], *Rosenkrandsen* [Rosary], *Korsets Tegn* [Sign of the cross], *Bibelen* [The Bible]; *4 Skrivere* [Four scribes], *En Pen af en Ørnefjer* [Pen made from an eagle's feather], *Blækket* [Ink], *Skind-Bogen* [Vellum book], *Bog-Ormen* [Book worm]; *Vagt-Hornet* [Sentry-horn], *Buen* [Bow], *Sværdet* [Sword], *Skjoldet* [Shield]; *Brændingen* [Surf], *Sæl-Skindet*

[Seal-skin], *Skibet* [Ship], *Et Mastetræ* [A mast], *Kiøl-Vandet* [Ship's wake]; *Konge-Spiret* [Royal sceptre].

Of the solutions considered by Grundtvig, some have subsequently been agreed by independent scholarly consensus; others remain peculiar to him. Together, as the above selection of titles shows, he construed them as alluding to the natural elemental world, to rural life and labour, to the farmhouse, to the home and hearth, to the simple religious life, to books and writing, to the warrior's weaponry, to the sea and the ship, and to kingship. Since he had a long-nurtured enthusiasm for popular proverbs and similar formulations in the mother-tongue, which so vividly articulated for him the character, the wisdom and the linguistic resources of the folk, it is no great surprise that he gave the riddles of the Exeter Book some particular attention.

Some of these Anglo-Saxon riddles are very lengthy and narrative in character, such as Riddle 1 to which Grundtvig assigned 205 half-lines²⁵ and the solution *Vinden* [The wind]. Others are very short such as Riddle 75. Brief though it is – *Ic ane geseah / idese sittan* [I saw a solitary woman, sitting]²⁶ – this riddle is in complete and correct verse form. It comprises two half-lines with two stressed syllables and a variable number of unstressed syllables in each, linked across a caesura by alliteration which here rests upon the rhyming vowels comprising the initial sounds of *ane* [solitary] and *idese* [woman] – the latter word being situated (correctly) in the so-called headstave position which lends to it a certain preeminence in the whole line. The form is ancient in northern European culture, reaching back at least to the period (probably fifth century) of the gold horn found in 1734 at Gallehus in Denmark, with its inscription: *ek hlewagastiR holtijaR / horna tawido* [I Hlewagastir son of Holt made the horn], where the word *horna* is in the headstave position.

Some of the riddles explicitly issue a riddling challenge, such as: *Saga hwæt ic hatte* [Say what I am called]. Others make no such prompt to the reader. Indeed, such is the character of some of these poetic riddles that it is not instantly clear to an editor whether they were in fact conceived as formal examples of the riddle-genre or whether they were poems based upon extended metaphor, cryptic allusion and a riddling (enigmatic) component. Thus, for example, the text which most modern scholars now call *Wulf and Eadwacer* and treat as the monologue of a woman cryptically alluding to a tragic situation of thwarted passion for a separated lover, presumed by some to be drawn from northern legend, was thought by Thorpe to be the first in the series of riddles – though he frankly admitted: “Of this I can make no sense” (Thorpe 1842, 380 and note on p. 527). After Thorpe,

various German scholars also treated it as one of the riddles (one ingeniously suggested solution being 'A riddle'). Grundtvig for his part (pp. 95r-96r) did not include it in his list of the formal riddles, and modern editors agree with him in not doing so.

As mentioned above, no solutions are explicitly given in the Exeter Book itself, and Grundtvig was little aided by any previous literary debate upon them. His procedure was evidently to concentrate first on the transcribing, and then subsequently to return to his own manuscript of the transcribed riddle-texts and insert interpretative comments and titles (solutions), sometimes in the space between the two vertical columns of his transcriptions, sometimes squeezed in at the head of the text in question. It is possible that in some cases he picked up a hint from Thorpe whose edition of 1842 included translations of the Old English texts; but he did not manage to determine a solution to all of them, as for example in the case of Riddle 44 (now generally solved as 'Key') and Riddle 46 (the solution to which appears to be 'Lot with his daughters and their sons'). These particular riddles belong to a cluster whose subject-matter may have faced him with special difficulties. Riddle 44 has recently been declared "Britain's oldest joke, a 1,000-year-old double-entendre about men's sexual desire."²⁷ Its solution is innocuous (Key) but austere indeed would be the audience which remained unalert to the nudging and winking of its ambiguous phrasing ("A remarkable thing hangs by the thigh of a man" etc.).

The riddle usually solved as 'The family of Lot' depends upon the audience disentangling the complex affinities arising from incest between father and two daughters. It has Biblical authority but Grundtvig leaves it untitled and uncommented. However, he did arrive at the solution 'Onion' for Riddle 25: "I am a wondrous being, to women a thing of joyful expectancy, to close-lying companions serviceable. I harm no town-dweller excepting my slayer alone. My stem is erect and tall (I stand up in a bed), and shaggy somewhere down below. Sometimes a peasant's quite comely daughter will venture, bumptious girl, to get a grip on me. She assaults my red self and seizes my head and clenches me in a cramped place. She will soon feel the effect of her encounter with me, this curly-locked woman who squeezes me. Her eye will be wet." Again, the solution is innocuous while the performer of the riddle has tempted, teased and perhaps titillated the audience with *double-entendre*. How alert Grundtvig was to this dimension of the text we have no evidence to determine; but one does not readily envisage him expounding it to Lise or Tante Jane.

The picturesque and dramatic narrative of Riddle 29 (Grundtvig's p. 103r) with its mythic flavour taxed him somewhat: "I saw a

wondrous wight bearing booty between her horns, a radiant vessel of light, artfully adorned, [bearing] booty home from the expedition; she desired to build herself and skilfully erect a bower in that burg, if it might so be. Then came a wondrous wight, which is known to all earth-dwellers, over the roof of the wall, and rescued the booty and drove the outcast unwilling home and went belligerently journeying westwards thence, hastening onwards. Dust rose to the skies, dew fell upon the earth, night proceeded forth. No man knew that wight's path thereafter." Grundtvig's note alongside his transcription reads: "Det er Maanen i Næde som fordrives af Morgen-Solen men hvad det er for et Bytte (huðe) Maanen har mellem sine Horn, veed jeg ikke, saa der er vel et Ordspil paa færde." [This is the moon in the *interlunium* which is driven away by the morning sun but what the booty (*huðe*) is which the moon has between her horns I do not know so there is probably a play on words going on]. Subsequent interpreters have mostly concurred in a solution involving moon and sun. The 'booty' may be interpreted as the dim shape of the indirectly illumined part of the moon when the moon is waning or when it is in its first quarter (sometimes a phenomenon viewed as an ominous portent, as in the traditional ballad of *Sir Patrick Spens*: "I saw the new moon late yestreen / With the old moon in her arm / And if we gang to sea, maister, / I fear we'll come to harm.")

His uncertainty over some of his interpretations Grundtvig indicated with a question mark. In other cases of doubt he explicitly noted his reservation: thus of Riddle 59, now generally accepted as having the solution 'Chalice' or 'Inscribed band around a chalice,' he says: 'Det seer ud som en Rosenkrands men jeg tænkte ikke, man havde dem saa tidlig' [This looks like a rosary, but I did not think people had them so early]. He was right to doubt, for it is generally held that the rosary was not introduced in the western Church until the thirteenth century.

It must seem doubtful, given the state of Anglo-Saxon scholarship in his day, that Grundtvig reached any informed opinion as to why Bishop Leofric should have placed such reading in the monastic library, or what the governing principle was of a poetic anthology which gave so much room to apparently trivial, frivolous and sometimes indecent riddles alongside poems which were otherwise explicitly religious, penitential and devotional or Christian-ethical and, with very few exceptions, didactic. Perhaps he would have discussed such matters if he had got as far as writing a general introduction to an edition. However, it seems equally unlikely that he was insensitive to the distinctive ways in which the techniques, strategies and tricks of the riddlers worked upon the construing mind of their audience.

Indeed, were he not so alert (to an extent that Thorpe was not), it would have been impossible to arrive at a solution of many of the riddles.²⁸ Bearing in mind the greater project which he had on his desk at this time – the writing and publishing of *Nordens Mythologi* – it may be illuminating to identify some of these characteristics of the metaphor-exercising riddles.

Helpfully, Riddle 42 makes an explicit statement of one working concept of ‘a riddle.’ The text opens with the riddle proper, an enigmatic assertion about “two curious beings” (*wyhte wrætlice twa*: the Old English word *wiht* can be applied either to human beings or to other creatures). This is followed by the provision of a key, an anagram of the two nouns that are the solution of the riddle. Then comes a teasing taunt to the performer’s audience. When the portentous diction is set aside the taunt amounts to something like “Come on! Surely one of you has worked it out by now!” but it is the portentous diction which interests us here: “Which man has unlocked, by virtue of this key, the fetters of the treasury-door that resolutely guards the riddle, its heart protected by ingenious chains against the adepts? It is now no secret to folk at their wine what those two vulgar-minded beings are called among us!” The “secret” (that is, the true meaning of the enigma) is perceived as a treasure, carefully and skilfully guarded behind a chained door. A key is offered, but even the key requires the determined application of a special intelligence in its use.

This particular riddle is frivolous and mock-portentous. It belongs to that cluster of sexually titillating riddles mentioned above. The two “vulgar-minded beings” prove to be a farmyard cock and his hen, coupling. Leofric’s monks were evidently allowed to titter and perhaps blush at the temporary illusion of two *human* beings “flagrantly frolicking out of doors, in copulation” – but the lesson learnt in the solving-process was, in kind, serious enough. The lesson was, that well-guarded behind the literal exterior lay an inner truth. The literal aspect might be ambivalent, ambiguous, potentially titillating, perhaps seeming to endorse the merely worldly, or the fleshly, even the sensual, the immoral. The task of the truth-seeker was to apply the proper key and thus find the innocuous (at least) or even the spiritually beneficial treasure concealed within. Reference to this salutary exercise, and indeed the selfsame image used to define it (that of unlocking a treasury), also occur in another Anglo-Saxon poem known to Grundtvig from his studies in another major codex of Anglo-Saxon religious poetry, the great Scriptural narrative poem *Exodus*.²⁹ Referring to the Scriptures themselves and “those laws which the Lord with his authentic words enjoined upon them [the Israelites] during the exodus” (tr. Bradley 1982, 64), the poet of *Exodus* exhorts his audi-

ence to make use of “the faculty, the body’s tenant, which interprets life’s meaning” in order to unlock “with the keys of the spirit” (*gastes cægum*) the ample benefits hidden therein. The poet takes it for granted that even (or perhaps *especially*) the authentic words of the Lord himself are to be treated as enigma, as discourse whose literal level must be interrogated, probed and penetrated, unlocked with the keys divinely provided – the keys of the spirit.

The tradition of such interpretation, already ancient and with some centuries still to run, is well summarised in the thirteenth century by Thomas Aquinas: “It is befitting Holy Writ to put forward divine and spiritual truths by means of comparisons with material things. [...] It is natural to man to attain to intellectual truths through sensible objects, because all our knowledge originates from sense. [...] It is also befitting Holy Writ [...] that spiritual truths be expounded by means of figures taken from corporeal things, in order that thereby even the simple who are unable by themselves to grasp intellectual things may be able to understand it” (*Summ. Theol.* I, 1, 9 responsio).

Let every man be in some degree an exegete, of discourses ranging from trivial and frivolous riddles to the Scriptures themselves. Riddles, therefore, may have provided for Leofric’s monks light-hearted training in the ultimately serious skills of exegesis, of extracting the deeper truths from any ambivalent, metaphorical, figurative or allegorical discourse.

Of such discourses there is no shortage elsewhere in the Exeter codex, in poems which demand to be ‘solved’ even though they are not in the formal genre of riddle. A notable example is *The Phoenix* which is based upon the ancient allegorical poem of Lactantius (fourth century). “Thus, discerning of mind, the wise man, the spokesman of God’s message [Lactantius], sang in far-off days concerning his resurrection into eternal life, so that we may the more readily understand the glorious signification that the illustrious bird [the phoenix] symbolises through his burning” wrote the Anglo-Saxon poet (*Phoenix* 570 ff.). This is the poem of which Grundtvig published an edition in 1840, the year of the coronation of Christian VIII. With the demise of the revered but conservative and authoritarian old king, Frederik VI, Grundtvig and many others were optimistic that a new Denmark could arise, Phoenix-like, from the (metaphorical) ashes of the old. As his lengthy foreword to the edition makes clear, it was with the full intention of harnessing to his contemporary polemic the metaphorical code and symbolic language of the Phoenix-myth that Grundtvig turned to this ancient allegorical text from the Exeter Book.

It was a commonplace idea throughout the Christian Middle Ages that such reconstruction or transformation from the literal signification

to the figurative signification engaged a kind of divine grace, something akin to a little miracle: the literal to the figurative is as water to wine, said a whole series of early Christian writers – nodding towards Christ's miracle at the wedding feast in Cana. For after all, the metaphorical potential of words – the capacity of words to suggest something other and additional to what they literally 'stand for' or 'are' – is not, in this medieval view, a matter of chance. Words are part of God's creation, given to his human creatures so that they may articulate both their sense of the material world in which they are temporally lodged *and* their perception of the spiritual which, in greater or lesser degree, points beyond the material and temporal to the eternal with and in God.

In Grundtvig's day, anyone academically trained in theology would necessarily have given much attention both to the role of metaphor and parable among the authors of the Scriptures and to the historical role of exegesis in the Christian interpretation and preaching of the Word; but it is not necessary to think that Grundtvig was actively aware of the explicit medieval orthodoxies which may have justified Bishop Leofric's gift of this book to the monastic library in Exeter. For after all, like so many other areas of medieval religious aesthetics and theory of spirituality, the composition and the construing of riddle, metaphor or allegory rested upon fundamental characteristics of the human imagination which hold good for almost any age and any prevailing cultural idiom. Though the enigmatic, the symbolic, the metaphorical and the allegorical come and go in literary and artistic fashion, they remain, in the larger scale of things, permanently and deeply entrenched in the semiotic tradition of western culture. This is the tradition into which the Anglo-Saxon riddles could offer an introduction, to Grundtvig as to Leofric's monks.

As a matter of fact, it seems likely that Grundtvig's experience in encountering the riddles and the enigmatic formulations of other poems in the Exeter Book was indeed recognition of the (for him) familiar and approved in poetry, which he could define in terms strongly reminiscent of the Neo-Platonic. Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen has written: "Structurally, Grundtvig's poetics accord with those of romanticism. But with him the religious definition of poetry is expressly Christian with its starting-point in Creation and Fall, and for him language is a symbol of "the deepest and most wonderful in the sensory world which, without belonging to it, reveals itself within it, and authenticates humankind's heavenly origin" (letter to Jacob Grimm, 11 March 1819) [...] Ambivalence and obscurity are to him almost a guarantee that the poet has in fact had a vision, a genuine inspiration" (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1980, I, 20).³⁰ Lundgreen-Nielsen is

referring categorically to Grundtvig's early writing (1798-1819) but it would not be difficult to demonstrate that this "religious definition of poetry" remained more or less valid with Grundtvig throughout his life.

The poetic idiom of these *ænimata* further confronts the reader with miniature riddles within riddles, in the form of kennings or poetic circumlocutions, similar to those familiar to Grundtvig from his readings in Old Icelandic poetry.

An example of such poetic circumlocution occurs in the line *Ongin mere secan / mæwes epel* [Look to the sea, the mew's domain], where the conventional formula *mæwes epel* provides the poet with a ready-made half-line. In this instance, the enigmatic dimension is only slight, since the phrase stands in such audible juxtaposition to *mere* [sea] in the first half-line; but in other instances the phrase (or one of its variants such as *hwæles epel* [whale's domain], *ganotes bæð* [gannet's bath], *swanrade* [swan's riding-place] – all poetic circumlocutions for 'sea') – may stand alone, calling for 'solution' by the audience. Within this poetic convention, poet and audience are constantly engaging together in the craft of the posing and construing of covert statement.

Grundtvig sometimes underlines these formulations as though in preparation for a glossary or some other item of eventual editorial apparatus; thus in Riddle 26 which Grundtvig solves as 'Book made of vellum' he underlines (p. 102v) the phrase *fugles wyn* [the bird's delight] and notes in the margin that the phrase stands for 'feather' and 'feather' stands for 'pen' – 'pen' being the 'solution' which helps the audience to work out that the riddle is about the craft of book-making. Similarly, in Riddle 21, solved by Grundtvig (and most subsequent editors) as *Ploven* [The plough], where the I-voice narrator says that his nose points downwards (*Neb is min niperweard*) and that he goes according as the *har holtes feond* [grey foe of the woodland] guides him, Grundtvig (p. 101r) underlines the phrase *har holtes feond* and notes alongside it: "Træets graa Fiende [det er] Staalet" [The tree's grey foe, that is, steel]. His kenning-trained compressed logic is: the enemy of the tree is the woodcutter's axe; the axe is of steel; 'steel' stands as metonym for the coulter – that is, the *neb*, the 'nose' – of the plough.

Fitly enough, the poets of these Exeter Book *ænimata* sometimes use runes to enhance the enigmatic nature of their compositions. Here, Grundtvig's engagement may have had deeper roots. Runes were particularly topical in Denmark in the eighteen-thirties and eighteen-forties, at least among those with any interest in the Scandinavian antiquity of which they were an icon. This interest had been given

great momentum early in the century when, moved by the theft and destruction of the Gallehus gold horns from the Kongelige Kunstkammer in 1802, Adam Oehlenschläger (1779-1850) wrote his poem *Guldhornene* – in which he made his own memorable contribution to the enigmatic mystique of the runes. Of those who would know their ancient mysteries, he wrote:

De higer og søger
i gamle Bøger,
i oplukte Høie
med speidende Øie,
paa Sværd og Skiolde
i muldne Volde,
paa Runestene
blandt smuldrede Bene.

They seek and search
in ancient books,
in opened grave-mounds
with scrutinising eye,
on sword and shields
in earthy ramparts,
on rune-stones
amongst mouldered bones.

Oldtids Bedrifter
anede trylle;
men i Mulm de sig hylle,
de gamle Skrifter.
Blikket stirrer,
sig Tanken forvirrer.
I Taage de famle.
“I gamle gamle
hensvundne Dage,
da det straalte i Norden,
da Himlen var paa Jorden,
giv et Glimt tilbage!”

Antiquity's achievements
they seemed to conjure;
but in murk they cloak themselves,
those ancient scripts.
The gaze stares on,
[but] thought grows confused.
They are groping in fog.
“Ye ancient, ancient
vanished days,
when there was a radiance in the North,
when heaven was on earth,
give back one glimpse!”

(Oehlenschläger 1803, 1-20)

In 1834 *Geheimearkivar* [Privy archivist] Finnur Magnússon announced his successful decipherment of an extensive runic inscription at Runamo in Blekinge, southern Sweden (which had formerly been a province of Denmark until ceded to Sweden by the Peace of Roskilde, 1658). The supposed inscription had been mentioned in the twelfth-century *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus who believed the runes were cut on the orders of the (semi-legendary) seventh-eighth-century Danish king Harald Hildetand to commemorate the deeds of his father. The runic inscription therefore held a prominent symbolic place in Danish national history. Magnússon had examined it the previous year in the company of Grundtvig's friend, the scholar Christian Molbech, and the eminent geologist, Johan Georg Forchhammer. Now, Magnússon believed he was able to construe a text confirming the historicity of Harald Hildetand and the great Battle of Brávellir. Not everyone found the interpretation convincing, however, and in 1844-

45 his younger colleague J. J. A. Worsaae demonstrated that Magnússon's transcriptions of the markings were inaccurate and, worse, that the markings were entirely naturally caused. Grundtvig, for his part, was reluctant to have to give up the Blekinge 'runes' and their historic testimony, and he nursed the hope that Magnússon's credibility might yet be restored.

It was in that same year of Worsaae's blow to national-romantic fictions around the Blekinge 'runes' that Grundtvig composed his poem *Rune-Bladet med "Christian den Ottende" til Det unge Danmark* [The rune-silver with *Christian the Eighth* for young Denmark] which he published as a preface to his *Skov-Hornets Klang mellem Skamlings-Bankerne* [The ring of the waldhorn among the Skamling-hills] (*US*, Bd. 9, 20-23; see further Bradley 2004, 255-266). The main text of *Skov-Hornets Klang* is a version of the speech Grundtvig made at Skamlingsbanken in the summer of 1844 to an open-air mass-gathering of supporters of Danishness in Slesvig. The prefatory poem features "et Bøge-Blad, // Tæt med Runer ristet" [a beech-silver closely inscribed with runes] which arrives aboard the ship 'Christian the Eighth' and bears a message to Denmark's youth. Behind this somewhat cryptic projection lies a set of real events and facts: Grundtvig, aboard the steamship 'Christian the Eighth,' returning exhilarated from Skamlingsbanken, had been stirred by the patriotism of students aboard the ship to recover his faith in Denmark's future as a confident and coherent folk proudly conscious of its past and its heritage and ready to reclaim its inheritance. Into his poetic projection of this experience he chose to import an element of the enigmatic, exploiting in his title the popular associations of runes with ancient Northern culture and mythic-heroic commemoration. He does not use runes in the poem (in the manner of the Anglo-Saxon poets), but he poetically envisages the missive as though it were a runic message; and insofar as the poem is enigmatic and cryptic in expression and prophetic in content, it accords with a primary meaning of 'rune' – that is, 'secret (utterance)' or 'enigmatic (utterance).'

The 'young Denmark' of the poem's title is represented by a female persona in Grundtvig's Foreword to *Skov-Hornets Klang* (*US* 9, 25-26): "Yes, in the same moment appeared *young* Danishness as a genuine daughter of the *old* [Danishness], saw this world's light and, as long as it burns, will surely show that she is also a genuine daughter of Asa-Thor who, actually with a native-born woman – that is, with the Danish woman Sif – had a daughter, a virgin Drude whom no one knew anything about but who has now been disclosed among the Skamling-hills and will doubtless learn to dance well when her elderly parents have their golden wedding, and Lady Sif, in place of those

locks which Loke stole and the grey tufts he left behind, shall be seen with the *Guld-Nakke*³¹ which Loke was forced to acquire for her from the skilful dwarves.”³²

Thus, with this masterly piece of Grundtvig's own enigmatic writing in mind, we may return to the Exeter Book and its riddles: for Grundtvig's chosen device of a runic message, invitational and prophetically optimistic, delivered off the sea to a hitherto wrongfully dispossessed woman, must remind any Anglo-Saxonist of an enigmatic poem transcribed by Grundtvig from the Exeter Book, involving the text now usually called *The Husband's Message*.³³

Particular editorial challenges ensured that he paid particular attention to the text of the Exeter Book here, and he can be said to have virtually devised this charming riddle himself. It is not immediately clear from the layout of the Anglo-Saxon manuscript at this point whether three sequences of text are to be taken as belonging together in one poem or whether they are to be distributed between two poems. Modern editors have distributed them between Riddle 60 and *The Husband's Message* but Grundtvig decides to treat them as one, and notes (p. 113v) that the three sequences “hænger sammen som et Kiærligheds Brev paa en opdrevet Planke” [cohere as a love-letter on a plank washed ashore]. This composite poem he treats as a riddle with the solution *Rune-Kiævlet* [Rune-stock]. His note here on the ‘Planke’ inscribed with runes may serve to clarify what he had in mind for the ‘Rune-Blad’ and ‘Bøge-Blad’ in *Skov-Hornets Klang mellem Skamlings-Bankerne*.

In the Exeter Book poem now called *The Husband's Message*, a sliver of wood on which a runic message is cut speaks to its recipient. It tells that it has come here in a ship, bearing news of an “immutably glorious covenant” established between him who dispatched the message and the recipient, a “prince's daughter.” By this covenant an end will now be put to a long and painful separation enforced between the two and an “ancient vow” will at last be fulfilled. The lady is to “look to the ocean, the sea-mew's domain; take to the ship so that [...] you may meet the man beyond the ocean-way, where he, your lord, is expecting you.” The message is confirmed enigmatically by Anglo-Saxon runes: “I conjoin S with R and EA and W and M to declare on oath that he would fulfill, by his living self, the pledge and the covenant of friendship which in former days you two often voiced.” Grundtvig copied the runes in his transcription, here as in the several other riddles which use runes, but he did not get as far as spotting that the poet is here exploiting the fact that each runic character has a name. If the names of the characters are substituted for the written runes, the text reads: “I conjoin Sun with Road [thus ‘Sun-road’, ‘Sky,

Heaven'] and Earth and Joy and Man to declare on oath that he would fulfill, by his living self, the pledge and the covenant of friendship which in former days you two often voiced" (Bradley 1982, 400). Thus the rune-stick pledges heaven and earth as witness that the man will restore joy to his separated spouse in fulfilment of their ancient covenant.

Again, in the case of Riddle 42 (mentioned above) which he solved as '*Laas og Nögel*' [Lock and key] Grundtvig missed the fact that the solution is included in the poem, in runic clues. This excellent riddle is one of several in the collection which afford us a vivid glimpse into the art of their live performance. The poet has scripted for the performer the action of writing in runes upon the floor as he teasingly challenges those in his audience who can read to solve the enigma, and delivers cryptic oral clues to complement the written ones: "To those men who understand books I can tell by runic staves upon the floor both the names together of those wights. Need must be there, and the second of a pair, and the splendid ash-tree, one in the row, two oaks, and just the same number of hailstones." 'Need' is in fact the name of the N-rune, of which two are required here. 'Ash' is the name of the Æ-rune. 'Oak' is the name of the A-rune, of which two are required. 'Hail' is the name of the H-rune, of which two are required. All that remains is to sort out the letters N, N, Æ, A, A, H and H into two words: *Hæn* and *Hana* – hen and cock.

However, Grundtvig was elsewhere quite capable of his own ingenuity in dealing with the runes. His transcription for Riddle 19 reads (my translation; capitals represent runes): "I saw a SROH, proud of spirit, with a splendid head, swift, strongly coursing across the meadow. On his back he had a NOM strong in battle. The AGEW rode, nailed. The far-flung path he travelled, strong in his running, a valiant COFOAH. His course was the more splendid, his journey the more remarkable." To add to his obfuscation of what may be a simple solution, the poet in two instances splits the rune-clusters between two poetic lines and engages the parts in the alliterative scheme. Grundtvig spotted however that, here as elsewhere among the riddles, the rune-clusters are to be read backwards as four single words (giving, respectively, 'Horse, man, warrior, hawk' – where 'warrior' and 'hawk' are used metaphorically as synonyms for the horse).³⁴ He inserted no title above the text, but in his list of tentative solutions on p. 96r he proposed '*Hestesko*' [Horseshoe], and in the space between the columns he noted: "Since all the runes have to be read backwards, the likely intention is that one has to think of *the nail* in *the horseshoe* which always goes about on its head and consequently must *see* everything *backwards*." [Da alle Runerne skal læses bagvendt er Meningen

ventelig, at man skal tænke paa Sømmet i Hesteskoen, som altid gaaer paa Hovedet og følgelig maatte see alting bagvendt.]. Had he been on better talking terms with his contemporary and fellow-citizen H. C. Andersen he might have commended the idea to him and thus fathered a whimsical new *eventyr*.

Indeed, his sense of whimsy in solving some of the riddles (as witness some of the titles in his list) is a reminder of what Lundgreen-Nielsen has well observed: "Grundtvig, with his exterior peculiarities, could court parody and caricature but in judging his often excessive-seeming public persona one must not forget his reserve, an underlying stratum of humour akin to Ludvig Holberg's (1684-1754), J. H. Wessel's (1742-85) og Jens Baggesen's (1764-1826)" (Lundgreen-Nielsen *ADL*, Indledning).³⁵

Similarly imaginative, if more obscure, is his annotation of Riddle 15 which he entitles *Floden* [The river]. The I-voice narrator says "Two ears stick up above my eyes" but, resisting all the riddler's prompts suggesting an animal, Grundtvig (p. 100r) writes "The two ears are the river banks" [De to Øren er Brinkerne]. The narrator speaks of being attacked by *an wælgrim wiga* [a murderous warrior]: Grundtvig notes "The enemy is fire" [Fienden er Ilden]. Perhaps he pinned his river-solution upon ambivalent statements such as *ic sceal* [...] *þurh steapne beorg stræte wyrcan* [I have to make a highway through the steep hill]. Thus his imagination has animated and dramatised the natural and the elemental. Almost all subsequent editors have settled for finding hunted and burrowing animals here, such as fox and badger.

Rather more serious and polemical is Grundtvig's interpretation of Riddle 40. He does not appear to have known (and probably was not in a position to know) that this riddle is in fact an Anglo-Saxon rendition of an *ænigma* composed in Latin by the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon poet Aldhelm³⁶ with the definite solution 'Creation.'

The text, in the form of an I-voice narration, opens with the declaration:

Ece is se scyppend ...
 Rice is se reccend ond on ryht cyning
 ealra anwalda ...
 He mec wrætlice worhte æt frymþe
 þa he þisne ymbhwyrft aere sette,
 heht mec wæccende wunian longe,
 þæt ic ne slepe sibþan æfre,
 ond mec semninga slæp ofergongeþ,
 beoð eagan min ofestum betyred.
 þisne middangeard mechtig dryhten
 mid his onwalde æghwær styreð;

swa ic mid waldendes worde ealne
 þisne ymbhwyrfþ utan ymbclyppe ...
 ne mæg mec oferswiþan segnberenda
 ænig ofer eorþan nymþe se ana god
 se þisne hean heofon healdeþ ond wealdeþ.

[Excerpts from lines 1-22; Eternal is the Creator ... mighty is the Ruler and King of all monarchs by right ... He wondrously wrought me at the beginning when he first established this world and bade me long remain vigilant, that thereafter I should never sleep; and yet sleep suddenly overcomes me and very often my eyes are closed. This earth the mighty Lord everywhere governs by his sovereignty; just so I, with the Ruler's word, embrace all this world ... no banner-bearer on earth can prove stronger than I, excepting the one God who holds and governs this high heaven.]

Grundtvig's solution is 'Ordet og Skriften (sammenblandede)' [The Word and Writing, mixed together]. He makes four annotations by way of clarification. The first annotation relates to his lines 19-22 (the eighth and ninth lines of the extract quoted above) where "sleep suddenly overcomes me and very often my eyes are closed." – this happens, says the note, "nemlig naar Ordet skrives" [namely when the word is written down], that is, when it lies dry and dead in books instead of living on the lips of teacher and pupil, pastor and congregation. One may assume that Grundtvig found this distinction sustained in other paradoxical statements in the poem:³⁷ "With my sweetness I outdo the perfume of spikenard" claims the I-voice (Ordet?); "and I am fouler than this black fen which here stinks evilly of filth" (Skriften?). The same polemic might be traced elsewhere in his riddle-solutions, albeit in a lighter vein. The Grundtvig who often referred to himself as a book-worm [*Bog-Orm*] perhaps enjoyed a sense of self-irony when (p. 107v) he solved Riddle 47 as *Bog-Ormen*: "A moth ate words. That seemed to me an extraordinary event when I heard of that marvel, that this worm, a thief in the dark, swallowed some man's utterance, his illustrious discourse and its tough foundation. The robber-visitor was not a scrap the wiser for having swallowed those words." At the same time, this solution may also be his further comment upon the futility of book-focussed teaching and learning. Most subsequent editors have arrived at this same solution. The riddle is close to one by Symphosius.

The second annotation (with reference to Grundtvig's lines 30-33; Muir 16-17) is upon the statement by the I-voice that "I am so timid that the grim enemy, advancing at the ready, can boldly frighten me" – that is, "when a shadow falls on the book" [*naar en Skygge falder paa Bogen*], explains Grundtvig.

In the third annotation, Grundtvig appeals to Danish folklore for an explanation. “A fist can grasp me, and three fingers easily hold completely around me” says the I-voice. Grundtvig notes: “This the old superstition of *the Pen*, or more correctly of the *Three Fingers*, that it can encompass *the word* with no problem.” [Dette er Pennens eller rettere den Tre Fingers gamle Overtro at den kan omspænde Ordet som ingen Ting].³⁸

One further aspect of the riddle-genre as Grundtvig encountered it in the Exeter Book is worth mentioning. This is the common riddling device of the first-person voice or I-voice, assigned to non-human and inanimate objects – the same device as was used by Grundtvig on the obelisk in Odden churchyard and by generations of makers of artefacts in various media, far back into northern antiquity. In origin, presumably, the device expressed a heightened human awareness of the haecceity – the ‘thisness’ – of a natural phenomenon such as thunder or wind; or it expressed a heightened awareness of the quiddity – the ‘whatness’ – of an inanimate object: thus a Viking-age sword might, through the inscription on its blade or hilt, declare in its own voice its name and the names of its maker and its owner, or an Anglo-Saxon ring might similarly be given its own voice to declare who caused it to be made or for whom it was intended.

Such anthropomorphising of the natural world and of man-made objects is not only a serviceable device for composers of riddles striving to mislead an overly literal-minded audience into envisaging a human referent when the solution in fact relates to an inanimate object. It is of course fundamental to the cultivation of myth and mythic narrative. Whatever its primitive beginnings, the device had already developed into a perceptual tool of great potency within Anglo-Saxon culture, as the device known in the terminology of literary rhetoric as *prosopopoeia*. Remarkable in this kind for its semiotic complexity and sophistication is the great free-standing Anglo-Saxon stone cross at Ruthwell near Dumfries, from the early eighth century, of which Grundtvig had opportunity to read in the *Thesaurus* of George Hickes which he borrowed from the Royal Library.³⁹

As well as finely executed representations of Christ and other figures from Christian story, it has alliterative verse carved upon it in runes – from which, couched in first-person terms, issues forth the voice of the historical Cross at Calvary: “I bore aloft the mighty King, heaven’s Lord; I dared not flinch. They insulted us both together. I was made wet with blood [...] Christ was on the cross [...] All this I witnessed. Sorely afflicted I was with sorrows [...]”

“All this I witnessed” [*Ic þæt al biheald*]: the ostensibly authoritative first-person voice of the Ruthwell Cross, granted to it by the unknown poet, can generate in its reader-audience a heightened sense of the actuality and immediacy of the historical crucifixion of Christ – just as the voice of the obelisk at Odden, granted to it by Grundtvig, can generate in its reader-audience a heightened sense of the actuality and immediacy of the fateful evening off Sjællands Odde, when the ships met in the dusk at sea, and the air began to glow.

Learned attention to the runes of the Ruthwell Cross began in England early in the seventeenth century. In 1703 George Hickes, *Thesaurus* part III (1703), incorporated the Icelandic Grammar (1651) of Runolphus Jonas, in connection with which there was some discussion of the Ruthwell runic inscriptions. Loans of Hickes’s *Thesaurus* to Grundtvig, prior to his visits to England, are recorded in the Protocols of the Royal Library Copenhagen. Naturally, Grundtvig was also aware of the studies of Scandinavian runes by his countrymen Ole Worm (1588-1655) and Rasmus Rask (1787-1832). In the year Grundtvig published his *Nordens Mythologi* (1832), Thorleif Gudmundson Repp communicated a paper to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland comparing Ruthwell’s runic alphabet with the runes occurring in the Exeter Book and thus discerning that the Ruthwell runes are Anglo-Saxon, not Scandinavian. Attention to the Cross continued within Grundtvig’s circle of friends and colleagues throughout the rest of his life. It was of particular interest to George Stephens, appointed English lecturer (subsequently professor) in the University of Copenhagen 1851, Grundtvig’s friend in his later years, editor of the fragments of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Waldhere* found (1860) in the Royal Library Copenhagen and author of two particularly relevant works: *The Ruthwell Cross, Northumberland, from about a. D. 680, with its runic verses by Cædmon, and Cædmon’s complete cross-lay “The holy rood, a dream”* [i.e. *The Dream of the Rood*] *from a South-English transcript of the 10th century. With translation, comments and facsimile-plates* (London and Copenhagen 1866); and *The Old-Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England, Now First Collected and Deciphered* (London & Copenhagen, 1867-68) which contained an imposing facsimile of the Ruthwell Cross.⁴⁰

As Stephens’ title indicates, the verses inscribed in Anglo-Saxon runes upon the Ruthwell Cross are related to the Old English poem known as *The Dream of the Rood* which is uniquely preserved in the Anglo-Saxon codex of prose and verse known as the Vercelli Book in the cathedral library of Vercelli, Piedmont. After the codex was first identified by Friedrich Blume in 1822 and described in his *Iter Italicum* (Berlin and Stettin, 4 vols., 1824-36), the text of *Rood*

became available in an English edition from 1836 when Grundtvig's rival Benjamin Thorpe published it as Appendix B in Charles Purton Cooper's *Report on Rymer's Foedera* (1836), 47–92. A further edition, by J. M. Kemble, *The Poetry of the Codex Vercellensis*, 2 volumes, was published in 1843 and 1856. Subsequently, the poem was sympathetically discussed not only by Stephens (1866, above) but by Grundtvig's friend and associate, Frederik Hammerich, in his *De episk-kristelige oldkvad hos de gotiske folk*, Copenhagen 1873. It belongs among a group of Anglo-Saxon poems on Christian themes which have retained a place in what might loosely be called the Grundtvig heritage to this day: see for example Noack 1996.

The Dream of the Rood – arguably among the finest pieces of religious poetry in the English language – is a remarkable Anglo-Saxon example of a poet's exploitation of the human mind's capacity to believe in the actuality of the I-persona devised by the poet, and of the human mind's capacity to perceive one thing as standing symbolically for another, to seek for the symbolic, or the spiritual, which lies beyond the material and literal. The poem is in effect a meditation upon the saving power of Christ's Cross. It is in the form of an I-voice narrative in which the dreamer-narrator tells how he was lifted from a state of spiritual desperation to spiritual enlightenment by a vision of the Cross (the Rood, Old English *rōd*). Within this narrative is enclosed the I-voice narrative of the Cross itself in which it tells the dreamer how (in parallel with the experiencing of the dreamer) it was lifted from a condition of humiliation and self-condemnation to glorification as witness and party to Christ's heroic self-sacrifice in suffering crucifixion – by which (as the prime model of this redemptive pattern) Christ rose from humiliation and death to resurrection and glory. In accord with the poet's complex and subtle exposition of the divine mystery of God's redemptive purposes towards mankind, the Rood itself has a shifting multiplicity of identities and roles (a jewelled liturgical cross, a venerable icon, a cosmic vision, a tree in the forest, a despised and polluted gallows, the Cross at Calvary, a sign carried in the bosom of the faithful in this world, a surety amidst worldly adversities, the beacon of judgment at Doomsday) – identities and roles which (and this is an aspect of the extraordinary affective power of the poem) merge with the identities and roles of both the dreamer and Christ himself. The sophisticated character of the Anglo-Saxon religious poetry to which Grundtvig found access through the Exeter Book, and in which he steeped himself, is well illustrated in the subtle conceptual, structural, and linguistic complexity of *Rood*.

This appropriately and finally brings us to brief consideration of the riddle alongside which Grundtvig commented “This riddle is well made” [Denne Gaade er godt gjort] – brief consideration, because regrettably he offers no insight into his detailed interpretation of this admired text. It is Riddle 39, to which (p. 104v) he gives the title-solution *Korsets Tegn*, the Sign of the Cross.

Writings say that this wight is evident and apparent among mankind at significant times. It has more power, great and special, than men know of. It will visit each mortal individually and then it departs again upon its way. It never stays there a second night, but it must for ever wander the exile’s path, homeless: it is none the more wretched for that. It has neither foot nor hand and never touched the ground, nor does it have either of two eyes. It has no mouth, nor does it speak with men. It has no senses, but writings say that it is the most pitiful⁴¹ of all wights that ever were born after their kind. It has neither soul nor life, but it must widely endure its paths through this wondrous world. It has neither blood nor bone – and yet it has proved a comfort to many people throughout this world. It never reached to the heavens, nor might it reach to hell, but it shall live for ever according to the precepts of the Glory-King. It would take long to tell how its life-destiny, the froward decrees of fate, shall proceed; that would be a remarkable matter to tell. Everything that speaks symbolically⁴² about this wight is true. It has no limbs but even so it lives. If you can quickly tell the solution with true words, say what it is called.

By what interpretations of the riddler’s enigmatic words Grundtvig arrived at this solution we cannot know for sure. It is not safe to assume he translated the words in the same terms as the present translator (above) has chosen. In virtually every literary translation, especially of poetry, translators constantly pre-empt their reader’s notional freedom of response to the source by silently making interpretative choices on their behalf; and in the case of such *ænigmata* as these it is as good as impossible in a translation to sustain the contrived lexical ambiguities of the source and to remain neutral, non-interpretative, in the task of carrying across the riddler’s multivalence of sense.

We might speculate that Grundtvig noted that the “wight” is something inanimate, insubstantial, that it works under the dispensation of the Glory-King, that it belongs in this world and within the temporal duration of this world (it will not pass onwards either to heaven or to hell), that it is the most pitiful (pity-full?) thing that ever was, that it brings comfort throughout the world, that it has more power, and a more special power, than men think, that it is noted for its presence at times of significance (in human life), that it belongs in no permanent abode and is under no one’s exclusive jurisdiction but, none the worse

for being homeless, it will visit anyone anywhere. However, none of this forces us inescapably to solve the riddle as 'The sign of the Cross' – and subsequent editors have indeed proposed quite different solutions including 'Dream,' 'Comet,' 'Speech,' 'Moon,' 'Day,' 'Time' and 'Cloud' (Muir 1994, II, 621). In being persuaded towards his particular solution, Grundtvig is yielding to some kind of cultural predisposition which picks out features for its own support among the ambiguities of the enigmatic discourse – and thereby reveals something of the special cast of his mind.⁴³

No doubt though, he was also responsive to the compositional skills of the poet-riddler. Like the 'Hen and Cock' riddle, this riddle has good performance features. There is a general rotundity of expression – many fine poetic phrases – and a very pleasing procession of paradoxes to perplex the audience; and finally, the teasing challenge – Come on, surely someone has worked it out by now.

There may, on the face of it, seem to be a long way between such a riddle and a hymn sung in the Danish church amid the solemnities of Good Friday. Nevertheless, in v. 12 of his hymn *Hil dig Frelser og Forsoner*⁴⁴ the words Grundtvig gives his congregation to sing are: "Ja, jeg troer paa Korsets Gaade" [Yes, I believe the riddle of the Cross]. The fact is that the Exeter Book riddle (as Grundtvig interpreted it) in its intellectually provocative manner, and the hymn with its reverential acceptance of the divine mystery of the atonement, both contemplate, and in a way celebrate, the seeming paradoxes which Christian redemption theology presents; and thereby both arrive at the same acknowledgement of the transcendent will and purpose of God. The kinship between these two genres – the *aenigma*, sometimes trivial, sometimes frivolous, occasionally vulgar, always challenging; and the hymn, providing for congregational profession of the truths and mysteries of the faith – may strike the modern rationalist and secular mind as remote; but it would have been well understood by Arnulf of Louvain and by the Anglo-Saxon monks of Exeter – and evidently it was equally well understood by Grundtvig.

Abbreviations

ASPR 1936: E. V. K. Dobbie, *The Exeter Book (Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* vol. III). New York.

Summ. Theol.: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, New Advent online <http://www.newadvent.org/summa> (8 June 2008).

US I-X: Holger Begtrup (ed.), *Nik. Fred. Sev. Grundtvigs Udvalgte Skrifter*, 10 vols (1904-09), Copenhagen.

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Notes

¹ The term, however, did not satisfy all who concerned themselves with the resources and character of the Danish language. Grundtvig's contemporary, the distinguished (and first) Professor of Nordic Languages in the University of Copenhagen, N. M. Petersen (1791-1862), a leading linguistic reformer and translator with a particular dedication to the ideal

- of a common Nordic language, wrote “vi mangle et ord til at udtrykke mythe. Nogle sige *sindbillede*; men (det er) et tysk ord.” [We lack a word to express ‘*mythe*’. Some say ‘*sindbillede*’ but this is a German word] (*Ordbog over det danske sprog*, s.v. *sindbillede*, citing Petersen’s *Nordisk Mythologi*, 2nd edition, 1863).
- ² “*Billed-Sprog* kalder man det, naar man med Navnene paa Dyr, Fugle, Træer og alle Haande synlige Ting, ikke mener disse Ting selv, men noget usynligt og aandeligt, som de tænkes ligne og paa en Maade svare til.”
- ³ For example, Chase 2001, 1: “Grundtvig believed that the key to understanding and interpreting myth is the relationship between the universal and the subjective. Grundtvig’s theory of myth is remarkably like the theories developed by the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung a century later. It is unlikely that Jung knew any of Grundtvig’s writings – Grundtvig is surprisingly little-known outside of Denmark – but their approaches to myth are so similar that Jung’s more developed insights help to make Grundtvig’s books easier to understand, while Grundtvig’s work illustrates and validates Jung’s theories.”
- ⁴ It was in the 1830s, according to Bishop H. L. Martensen’s memoir (Bradley 2008, 250) often cited in this context, that Grundtvig’s “particular predilection for the Middle Ages” impressed the (future) bishop. “In history, we would often return to the Middle Ages and we talked at various times about Ansgar [ninth-century “Apostle to the North”] and his dreams. Grundtvig [...] declared that still in our own days there were characters who basically belonged in the Middle Ages; and I sometimes took the impression that he regarded himself as a medieval character.” But besides this anecdotal testimony, there is of course abundant evidence of this predilection and character-trait within Grundtvig’s own writings.
- ⁵ An important evaluation of the longer-term historical significance of Grundtvig’s mission is in Lundgreen-Nielsen 1994.
- ⁶ A detailed analysis of the transcriptions is in Bradley 1998.
- ⁷ The story of Grundtvig’s dealings with the London publishers and the English antiquarian establishment who squeezed him out was researched by Helge Toldberg and reported in Toldberg 1947, 258-311. See also Bradley 1998, 10-13; and relevant source texts and Index entries in Bradley 2008. Thorpe had recently spent two years studying Anglo-Saxon in Copenhagen with the distinguished linguist and philologist Rasmus Rask (1787-1832). A recent judicious summary of Thorpe’s contribution to Anglo-Saxon studies (Hall 2001, 437) provides a perspective on Grundtvig whose prospectus *Bibliotheca Anglo-Saxonica* (1830; proposing a comprehensive programme of publications) is mentioned immediately before the following quotation: “Another scholar with sweeping ambitions was Thorpe, who edited the poems of the Junius manuscript in 1832, an anthology of prose and verse, *Analecta Anglo-Saxonica*, in 1834, and another ten editions before he died in 1870 [...], making him the most prolific editor in the history of Anglo-Saxon studies

– this for a man whose first edition appeared when he was 50 years old. The key to Thorpe's stunning productivity is that he was content with journeyman work, always producing, never polishing, always publishing, never perfecting.”

- ⁸ A transcription made by Robert Chambers (now London British Library Additional MS 9067) was already in progress in 1831 though it was not completed until 1832 when Frederic Madden undertook additional collation with the Anglo-Saxon codex (see further Bradley 1998, 14, 20).
- ⁹ Grundtvig's other chief source of comparative readings of the manuscript text was 'Conybear' (that is, Conybeare 1826).
- ¹⁰ As an indication of the scale of Grundtvig's dedication to the recovery of the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus which he believed was severely neglected and hugely underesteemed, it is worth noting here that in addition to his work on the *Beowulf* codex (London British Library Cotton Vitellius Axx) and the Exeter Book, he also gathered a bulky portfolio of materials (Royal Library Copenhagen Grundtvig Arkiv Fascicule 320) relating to the third of the four major surviving codices of Anglo-Saxon poetry, Oxford Bodleian Library Junius 11, and including transcriptions of the scriptural poems then attributed by some to Cædmon.
- ¹¹ Somewhat cryptically Grundtvig envisages the *Rune-Maal* as being inscribed upon a *Bauta-Steen* (a memorial monolith characteristic of ancient Scandinavian culture). He may well be alluding to the obelisk raised (1809) in the churchyard at Odden, Sjælland, over the graves of the national hero Willemoes and others killed in the sea-battle off Sjællands Odde (1808). He had himself composed the verse epitaph inscribed upon it. He fervently hopes this will not prove to be the one and only time that the Danish folk witnesses such heroism and calls upon its poets to honour it and commit its example to posterity. Interestingly, in the light of discussion further on in this article, Grundtvig endows the *Bauta-Steen* with an "I-persona" and an "I-voice" and thus, like a living being, it addresses the viewer: "HER ER IEG SAT TIL EN BAUTASTEEN" [Here am I set as a *bautasteen*]. See further Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen's note on *Rune-Maal* in his article in this present volume.
- ¹² Lundgreen-Nielsen, by personal communication, August 2008.
- ¹³ "Grundtvig forlader den moderne litteraturs verden efter at have draget dens fornemste erkendelsesmiddel og udtrykselement, symbolet, ud af en overvejende værkrettet kunstnerisk sammenhæng for at bruge det i hverdagens arbejde. Han fylder hele sit liv og giver det virkekraft med sin symbolværdi."
- ¹⁴ The thesis, or at least the persuasiveness of its exposition, has not gone unchallenged: see most recently Auken 2005, 65 (Auken's book is a major contribution to the literary study of Grundtvig the mythologist and mythologiser). Implausible though it may seem at first sight, even the strange events of Palm Sunday 1867 may demonstrate how deeply embedded this *selvsymbolik* was in Grundtvig, and what bearing it had upon his position in areas as diverse as theology, liturgy, politics,

- religious revival, national identity, international relations and more: see Bradley 2008, Index *s.v.* Palm Sunday 1867; and Bradley 1993.
- ¹⁵ Evidence (watermarks and dealers' stamps) from the handmade paper used by Grundtvig supports this dating (Bradley 1998, 13-14 and *passim*).
- ¹⁶ However, J. J. Conybeare's pioneering work on the Exeter Book, published 1811-13 and 1826 (Conybeare 1826), was known to Grundtvig from holdings of the Royal Library Copenhagen before he first visited England in 1829 (Bradley 1998, 9).
- ¹⁷ This page numbering follows the pagination marked in the fascicule.
- ¹⁸ In his introduction to his edition of the Exeter Book Poem *The Phoenix* (1840), Grundtvig wrote: "I hope to have divided up the lines with a somewhat better sense of metre than the English Anglo-Saxonists have yet achieved for themselves, although, with the help particularly of Rask's enlightenments, they have undeniably made great strides since the beginning of this century when in England they had as yet not the slightest concept of alliteration in the Anglo-Saxon verses" [Jeg ... haaber at have afdeelt Linierne med lidt bedre Takt end de Engelske Angelsachser endnu har erhvervet sig, sköndt de, ved Hjælp især af Rasks Oplysninger, unægtelig har gjort Kæmpeskridt siden Begyndelsen af dette Aarhundrede, da man i England endnu ei havde mindste Begreb om Rim-Stavene i de Angel-Sachsiske Vers] (Grundtvig 1840, 14). As he here tacitly concedes, he was himself capable of occasionally misconstruing how particular lines worked (see further Bradley 1998, 20-21).
- ¹⁹ The scribe of the Exeter Book was evidently copying from an older manuscript – and himself sometimes erroneously ran separate texts together into one – for example, conflating 42 and 43, and 47 and 48 (Muir 1994, 1, 321). There is some evidence that in incorporating a set of a hundred riddles the compiler of the Exeter Book was consciously conforming with an established tradition in which earlier exemplars are: a collection by two eighth-century Anglo-Saxon clerics, Tatwine, Archbishop of Canterbury and 'Eusebius' (probably Hwætberht, abbot of Jarrow and friend of Bede); a seventh-century collection of Latin riddles by the Anglo-Saxon Aldhelm, bishop of Malmesbury; and a collection of *ænigmata* by the Latin poet Symphosius whose identity and date are uncertain.
- ²⁰ As illustrated in some of the poetry in the Icelandic Elder Edda. Denmark too had its medieval tradition of riddling, reaching back to the twelfth-century *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus and beyond. Closely associated with the culture of folk-proverbs, it is notably represented in the collections of the otherwise obscure figure Peder Laale (c. 1300) whose work, intended to provide material for teaching in schools, began to appear in print from the beginning of the sixteenth century. Grundtvig's son Svend included riddling verses from Icelandic and Danish in his *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, begun in 1853; and a collection of popular riddles was published by Evald Tang Kristensen in *Danske Folkegaader* (Struer, 1913).

- ²¹ For the sake of consistency with Bradley 1998 this numbering of the riddles follows *ASPR* 1936. Where any case of revision of *ASPR* numbering by Muir 1994 is relevant to the present context, this is also noted. Grundtvig's numbering diverges from both because of different decisions he took in determining cases of uncertain boundaries between poems. Since they have no particular significance in the present context, his numbers are not cited here; but they are listed together with the corresponding *ASPR* numbers in Bradley 1998.
- ²² In Fasc. 316, pp. 95v-96r, the titles of 'solved' riddles are divided into two consecutive sets both headed *Gaaderne* [The riddles], and a further list gives tentative titles for the riddles Grundtvig found 'Tvivlsomme' [Doubtful]. On Fasc. 316, p. 122v occurs another list of twenty titles, all of which occur in the lists on pp. 95v-96r, except for a title proposed for Riddle 31 (Fasc. 316, p. 103v) which Grundtvig solves as '*Sølvkanden*' [Silver jug]. In a few cases Grundtvig notes a possible solution alongside a text, without including the solution in his lists. The lists were evidently finalised in or after 1842, because Grundtvig cites page references to Benjamin Thorpe's *Codex Exoniensis*, published in 1842 (see Bradley 1998, 45, note 114 and "Introduction", p. 24). Thorpe himself attempted very few solutions to the riddles ("they have baffled me" – Thorpe 1842, x).
- ²³ Grundtvig assigns the noun the 'common' gender (*en løg, løgen*) in accordance with a tendency of the first half of the nineteenth century to use the 'common' gender to designate the species in general while the 'neuter' gender (*et løg*) was used for the individual plant. In modern standard Danish the noun occurs only with 'neuter' gender. See *ODS* vol. 13, col. 579.
- ²⁴ Grundtvig uses the noun *myg*, in common with other leading writers of the period. The standard modern Danish form is *mygge-sværme*. See *ODS* vol. 14, col. 590.
- ²⁵ Modern editors of Anglo-Saxon alliterative poetry treat the two halves of the alliterating unit as comprising one line and they number these lines accordingly, whereas Grundtvig numbered each half-unit. Though Grundtvig questioned the competence of English scholars to deal with alliterative poetry, he was himself capable of misunderstanding the alliterative structure of a line, thereby misreading line-divisions (Bradley 1998, 20-21).
- ²⁶ The proposed solution 'Hen' rests on the available special meaning of 'to sit' when applied to a hen bird incubating eggs. Grundtvig was not disposed to discern such brief items as being riddles in their own right and tended, as in this case, to assign the lines to a longer adjacent text. Muir (1994, II, 669) argues for combining this text with the preceding one, into a single riddle.
- ²⁷ By "researchers from Wolverhampton University" who "found the wry observation in the *Codex Exoniensis*" – cited online by Arts Correspondent Stephen Adams, Telegraph.co.uk, 1 Aug 2008.

- 28 But Grundtvig too could sometimes give vent to frustration. With reference to Riddle 93 (Muir 92), where damage to the manuscript exacerbates the enigmatic obscurities of the text, he has written in the space between the columns: “Det er en Pen og har ingen Gaase-Fier været, men om det var paa en Ørn eller en anden høitflyvende Fugl den sad, før den blev skudt ud af sin Yngre Broder. det skal der bedre Øjne end mine til at see gennem Taagen.” [This is a *pen* and has not been a *goose-feather*, but whether it was on an eagle or some other high-flying bird it sat, before it was pushed out by its *younger brother*, it will take better eyes than mine to see through the fog].
- 29 *Exodus* is in the codex designated Oxford Bodleian Library Junius 11, source of the poems once attributed by some to Cædmon of which Grundtvig also prepared a transcription, never published.
- 30 “Grundtvigs poetik stemmer strukturelt med romantikkens. Men hos ham er den religiøse definition af poesi udtrykkeligt kristen med udgangspunkt i skabelse og syndefald, og sproget er ham et symbol på “det Dybeste og Vidunderligste i Sandse-Verdenen, som, uden at tilhøre den, aabenbarer sig deri, og beseigler Menneskets himmelske Herkomst” (brev til Jacob Grimm den 11. marts 1819) [...] Mangetydighed og dunkelhed er ham næsten en garanti for, at digteren faktisk har haft et syn, en ægte inspiration.”
- 31 A richly (often professionally) embroidered item forming the back of a traditional formal and festive head-dress once particularly favoured by Danish countrywomen.
- 32 “Ja, i den samme Stund kom den *unge* Danskhed, som en ægte *Datter* af den *Gamle* for Dagen, saae denne Verdens Lys og vil, mens det brænder, sikkert vise, at hun er ogsaa en ægte *Datter* af *Asa-Thor*, som virkelig med en indfødt Kvinde, altsaa med *Dannekvinden Sif*, havde en *Datter*, en Jomfru *Drude*, som Ingen vidste Rede til, men som nu blev oplyst mellem [p. 26] *Skamlings-Bankerne*, og lærer nok at dandse pænt til hendes gamle Forældre skal have deres *Guld-Bryllup*, og Fru *Sif*, istedenfor de Lokker, *Loke* stjal, og de graa Stumper, han levnede, skal sees med » *Guld-Nakken* «, som *Loke* blev nødt til at skaffe hende hos de konstige Dværge.”
- 33 For a discussion of this possible association, see Bradley 2004, 255-266.
- 34 Reading a string of runes right to left instead of left to right was one of the strategies by which Magnússon devised (1834) an interpretation of the supposed runes at Blekinge. Thorpe (1842) also discerned the riddler’s simple ploy. But Grundtvig surely needed neither of these authorities to help him spot the trick.
- 35 “Grundtvig kunne med sine yderliggående særheder udfordre til parodi og karikatur, men ved bedømmelsen af hans ofte overdrevent virkende offentlige personlighed skal man ikke glemme hans reserve, en underbund af humor i slægt med Ludvig Holbergs (1684-1754), J.H. Wessels (1742-85) og Jens Baggesens (1764-1826).”
- 36 From the early days of his study of Anglo-Saxon, however, Grundtvig certainly knew the name and repute of Aldhelm (Ealdhelm, Oldhjelm), a contemporary of

- Cædmon. He mentions the two poets together in his discussion of the possible authorship of *Beowulf* (Grundtvig 1820, xxvii).
- 37 Aldhelm, in the Latin source, was listing the extremities that are comprehended within Creation – the huge and the tiny, the sweet-smelling and the foul-stinking, the brave and the timid, etc.; but it is also characteristic of the riddles as a whole to use seeming paradox as an enigmatic device. The challenge to the audience was to resolve the paradox into a consistency.
- 38 “The ancient Three-Finger superstition” is presumably the invocation of the Trinity as the most solemn affirmation of one’s word – as for example described by Knut Hamsun (1859-1952) in *Sult* (1890): “I grew intoxicated with this unparalleled sin; I stuck my three fingers in the air and with trembling lips swore in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost that they were cauliflowers.” [Jeg berused mig i denne mageløse Synd, jeg rakte mine tre Fingre ivejret og svor med dirrende Læber i Faderens, Sønnens og den Helligaands Navn, at det var Kaalhoveder] (Hamsun 1966, 170) – a folk-practice which Grundtvig might well have seen as a relic of Romish superstition; but compare also B. S. Ingemann (1789-1862) in his story *De fortryllede Fingre (Et Eventyr)* [The enchanted fingers (A fairy-story)], where an old godmother offers a charm to help a young girl who is dissatisfied with her looks: “If it is your serious wish, my child, to have that power you previously desired for yourself” she said with quiet seriousness, “And if you yourself want to be able to refashion your face, then stretch out your first three fingers on your right hand and lay them thus in the middle of this symbol so that you don’t thereby touch any of the lines! Then pronounce three times the name Hagith and wish with all your might for what you are thinking of! And, if it can come to pass without sin or depravity, you will receive the ability you wished for – but you must not speak about it to anyone!” [“Er det dit Alvor, mit Barn, at du vil have den Magt, du før ønskede dig” – sagde hun med stille Alvor – “og vil du selv kunne omdanne dit Ansigt – saa udstræk dine tre forreste Fingre paa din høire Haand og læg dem saaledes midt i dette Tegn, at du ikke derved berører nogen Linie! Fremsig saa tre Gange Navnet Hagith, og ønsk af al Magt, hvad du tænker paa! – og, hvis det kan skee uden Synd og Fordærvelse, vil du faae den Evne, du ønskede dig – men du maa ikke tale derom til noget Menneske!]] (Ingemann 1847).
- 39 Grundtvig appears, from Royal Library lending protocols for 1816 onwards, to have turned to George Hickes’s *Grammatica Anglo-Saxonica* (1711) and his *Thesaurus* soon after his interest in Anglo-Saxon was sharpened by G. J. Thorkelin’s publication of his edition of *Beowulf* in 1815 (Bradley 2002, 165-167).
- 40 Like Magnússon in respect of the Blekinge runes, Stephens, in respect of the Ruthwell runes, seems to have conceded too much to wishful thinking. His decipherment yielding the authorial claim “Cædmon made me” may well have excited Grundtvig who had long since established an almost proprietary interest in Cædmon (Bradley 1996) as a forerunner to

himself (and successor to David the psalmist) in the lineage of divinely inspired and prophetic poets; but no one else proved able to arrive at the same reading. Authorship of *The Dream of the Rood* was soon tentatively assigned to Cynewulf, which could offer Grundtvig some consolation since to Cynewulf was also sometimes attributed *The Phoenix*, edited and published by Grundtvig in 1840.

⁴¹ The dominant sense of the Old English superlative adjective here (*earmost*) is ‘most pitiful, most to be pitied’ but the positive form *earn* also occurs in the adjectival compound *earn-heort* rendering Latin *misericors* (tender-hearted, merciful, full of pity) in the Old English translation of Gregory’s *Dialogues* 1, 2 (Bos/Toll. 1898, 1921, 234). The common factor is the semantic nuance of ‘pity’ in *earn* (and its derivatives) and it is not entirely improbable that here the poet deliberately sought the sense-ambivalence of ‘to be pitied’ and ‘full of pity.’

⁴² *wordum becneð*: the verb *becneð* derives from the noun *becn* ‘beacon, portent, sign, symbol’ and thus a literal sense of the phrase is ‘symbolises in words.’

⁴³ In the online announcement of the Grundtvig digitalisation project, (http://www.grundtvig.dk/akademiet_grdrtvudg.asp [August 2008]), various Grundtvig-scholars are quoted expressing their enthusiasm over anticipated benefits. One of them reads: “To attempt to establish for oneself an overview of a concept such as ‘gåde’ [riddle] in Grundtvig’s texts is very difficult and takes an incredible amount of time. A digitalisation of Grundtvig’s works will make a speedy overview possible and one will be able more easily to see possible connections and thereby come up with interpretations. There will simply be time for more actual research.” (my tr.). Evidently there is much more to look forward to on Grundtvig and riddles in future issues of *Grundtvig-Studier*.

⁴⁴ *Sang-Værk til den Danske Kirke* (1837), vol. 1, 455-457. Hymn 192, v. 9, in *Den Danske Salmebog* (Copenhagen 2007). Grundtvig’s source was a medieval Latin hymn by Arnulf of Louvain (before 1250).