

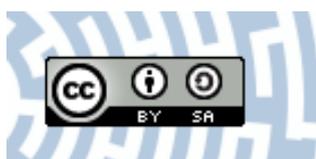


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Title: Say what I am : Aldhelmian riddle as the language of transformation

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Citation style: Borysławski Rafał. (2002). Say what I am : Aldhelmian riddle as the language of transformation. W: W. Kalaga, T. Rachwał (red.), "(Trans)-formations I : identity and property : essays in cultural practice" (S. 187-201). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



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RAFAŁ BORYSŁAWSKI

Say What I Am: Aldhelmian Riddle as the Language of Transformation

Nu snottre men swiþast lufiaþ
midwist mine; ic monigum sceal
wisdom cyþan; no þær word sprecað
ænig ofer eorðan. Ðeah nu ælda bearn
londbuendra lastas mine
swiþe secað, ic swaþe hwilum
mine bemiþe monna gehwylcum.

[Now wise men love very much
my presence; To many shall I
announce my wisdom; nor will there be spoken any word
over earth. Although now the sons of men,
the earth-dwellers, fiercely seek
my tracks, I sometimes
conceal my path from all men.]

Riddle 94, *The Exeter Book*, 10^o/11^o c.

The role of riddles in the development of literary forms cannot be underestimated, although nowadays their generic identity is mostly limited to the sphere of childish word games. Riddles, having evolved from oral origins and giving rise to various literary forms, are inextricably connected with the notion of metamorphosis to the extent possibly even greater than any other literary genre. A riddle acquires its intrinsic character verbally veiling the object it shrewdly attempts to describe. In order to do so, it resorts to the change within the frame of reference conventionally applied to the object in question. However, not only are the riddles created by transforming the referential system for their actual objects but it is also the very formula of the riddlic element in them which often undergoes transformation. The intention of my essay is to illus-

trate the possibility of such processes by discussing a particular collection of eighth-century Anglo-Latin riddles composed by Aldhelm bishop of Sherbourne.

That the riddlic forms were vital for culture creating processes in almost any society is now beyond doubt. It is attested geographically and historically by a variety of sources, ranging from the earliest cuneiform texts of Sumer, the Sanskrit *Vedas*, Old Icelandic sagas or remote contemporary oral cultures from South-East Asia. The primeval potency of the form and its mutable nature are conspicuous if we take into account the etymologies of the words denoting riddles in various languages. Even a sketchy analysis of the Indo-European languages reveals that the primordial functions attributed to what we now call riddles used to be connected with the domain of the serious, only later giving rise to the playful elements which are now riddles' main focus. Riddling and riddles were regarded as belonging to the sacred rather than the profane; they performed the roles ascribed to divination (cf. French *devinette* or Italian *indovinelli*, derived from Latin *divinus*, "divine" but also "prophetic"; Russian and Polish *zagadka* or Czech *hadanka* related to Old Church Slavonic *gadan-ye*, "divination, guessing, riddle") as well as with wisdom in general (cf. Old English *rædelle*, *rædelse*, or Old High German *râdisle* with Old English *ræd*, "counsel, opinion" or Old High German *rat*, "counsel"). Curiously, while Germanic languages seem to focus more on the common-sensical, pragmatic sides of riddles, Romance and Slavonic etymologies appear to identify the concept with more esoteric spheres of religion and soothsaying.

Thus etymology proves that the notion of riddle has undergone several semantic shifts. What appears to be even more conspicuous is that riddles have always been preoccupied with the forms of identity transformation. The main distinctive feature of the genre lies in describing something anew, by estranging the description from its customary linguistic environment. At the same time certain hidden textual ties between the subject and its riddlic representation must be preserved or facilitated, so as to engender the provocative game of wits between the text and its recipient. Posing a successful riddle, one may be tempted to say, is then comparable to walking a tightrope stretched between incomprehensibility and transparency of the text. Simultaneously, however, as the active participation of the reader/listener is the *sine qua non* of the riddlic discourse, riddles are involved in the process of transformation taking place within his or her frame of mind. They offer the possibility of sudden, epiphanic understanding, when the initially estranged subject, so to speak, "returns" to the reader/listener. This "return," which can be understood in terms of Aristotelian *anagnorisis*, materialises through the process of reverse transformation, that is through the recipient's reconstruction of the estranged identity. Thus the riddlic discourse may be seen as presenting an interesting model of communication in literature as a whole. And indeed, literary potency of riddles has been widely acknowledged, ranging from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, where

they were recognised as sources of ingenious metaphors whose initial obscurity only strengthened the impact of the text,¹ to Northrop Frye's study, where riddles are referred to as "the generic seeds or kernels, possibilities of expression sprouting and exfoliating into new literary phenomena."²

Interestingly, the enigmas of Aldhelm (ca. 640-709) appeared for the first time in order to illustrate literary matters as he included them to provide examples for *De metris*, his treatise on Latin meter sent to King Aldfrith of Northumbria (685-705). Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury and bishop of Sherborne, was arguably one of the most eminent men of letters to have emerged from the recently Christianized kingdom of Wessex, the man whose influence outreached both his native land and his era. The *Aenigmata* attached to his scholarly study most probably instigated a prolific tradition of Anglo-Latin and Anglo-Saxon literary riddles of which the most famous instances are the Old English riddles enclosed in the *Exeter Book*. Aldhelm's enigmas are so diverse in themes that the collection appears to be short of any internal logic at first glance. Furthermore, it displays a feature which the *Exeter Book* riddles lack; each of Aldhelm's enigmas is preceded by a title, simultaneously acting as its solution. Although such practice was not uncommon and was employed by some late Roman enigmatographers, the fundamental principle of riddling appears to have been jeopardised there. The obvious doubt emerging at this point would be that since the solutions are known from the very beginning, the enigmatic is non-existent. I believe and aim to demonstrate, however, that this apparent contradiction is precisely where Aldhelm's formula of riddle becomes transformed from the seemingly playful form into a manifestation of a complex world-view. In order to disentangle this paradox we must begin with considering the question what constitutes the enigmatic element in Aldhelm's collection.

The Biblical omnipresence of God *and* the omnipresence of his wisdom, identified with the Holy Spirit, was a dogma which was particularly emphasised by the early Christian scholars. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, an anonymous Christian philosopher who probably lived in Syria around the 6th century, explains it thus in chapter seven of *The Divine Names*:

God is praised as "Logos" [word] by the sacred scriptures not only as the leader of word, mind, and wisdom, but because he also initially carries within his own unity the causes of all things and because he penetrates all things, reaching, as scripture says, to the very end of all things. But the title is used especially because the divine Logos is simpler than any simplicity and, in

¹ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1967), Book III, Ch. II, p. 357 and Book III, Ch. XI, p. 409.

² Northrop Frye, "Charms and Riddles," in *Spiritus Mundi. Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 123.

its utter transcendence, is independent of everything. This Word is simple total truth. [...] The man in union with truth knows clearly that all is well with him, even if everyone thinks that he has gone out of his mind.³

Pseudo-Dionysius appears to be postulating that in order to attain spiritual balance in this world man must become aware of the truth which is within the Word, and which, in turn, is God. The search for the truth is consequently the path towards God. Enlightenment is only possible through answering an all-encompassing riddle, whose answer is the omnipresent wisdom of God. An even more famous contemporary of Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory the Great, follows the same line of reasoning, employing a more straightforward style: "When we look closely at the outer form of a thing we are referred to its inner meaning, for the wonderful works of the visible world possess the marks of the creator; and though we are still not able to see him, we incline towards him if in those things which he has made we admire him."⁴ Christian confidence in God's personal participation in the process of creation and the necessity to discern and understand His ubiquitousness in every being, might have been, and indeed was, interpreted as resembling a riddle posed by Him to mankind.

With this perspective in mind, Christian attractiveness of the riddle form becomes obvious. Firstly, they were composed on the basis of a design which was not self-evident but the discovery of which was a prerequisite to the discovery of the riddle's meaning. According to Christian ideology this process imitated the divine plans behind each of God's creations. Secondly, since the variety of topics within the riddle collections was great, riddles reflected the variety of God's works. Aldhelm's *Aenigmata*, beside their didactic function of exemplifying the complexity of Latin meter and beside their entertaining qualities, evidently share the Christian point of view on the form in particular and on the world in general. The speaking personae of Aldhelm's riddles are not only their actual subjects, but also tokens of the divine wisdom. It is the holy Logos, the *vox Dei*, which continuously speaks through those objects. Aldhelm's invocation to the Eternal Judge constituting the *Praefatio* to his enigmas, presents his riddles as involved in disclosing the secret schemes of divine creation:

Limpida dictantur metrorum carmina praesul
Munera nunc largire, rudis quo pandere rerum
Versibus enigmata queam clandestina fatu:
Sic, Deus, indignis tua gratis dona rependis.

³ *Basic Issues in Medieval Philosophy*, eds. Richard N. Bosley and Martin Tweedale (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997), p. 597.

⁴ Cited in F. H. Whitman, *Old English Riddles* (Ottawa: Canadian Federation for the Humanities. Monograph Series No. III, 1982), p. 62.

Patron of him who songs in flowing verse
 Composes, now bestow thy gifts on me,
 That I with my rude lines may bare in speech
 The secret riddles of created things –
 To the unworthy thus thou giv'st thy gifts.⁵

Metaphorically speaking, Aldhelm sees his role as a messenger of the divine Logos, unveiling “the secret riddles of created things,” for the only true riddler is God. Aldhelm’s view in a more contemporary version seems to be repeated in the words of Jorge Luis Borges who, in one of his allegorical stories, observed that puzzles do involve godlike privileges: “it is the prerogative of God, not man, to strike confusion and inspire wonder.”⁶ It is only natural, then, to comprehend what Aldhelm might have considered as the true enigma of his *Aenigmata* as the sinuous path leading from their subjects to the elements of divinity enclosed in them. The presence of titles in the collection does not diminish the sense of mystery but rather intensifies it. The title is merely the initial form which the eye meets, much in the manner of perceiving the object in the physical world. The way in which the object is portrayed is dramatically different from the initial association and it is there where the new, richer signification can be found. The reader/listener is to carefully follow that way, savouring the intricacies of particular riddles and comparing them with the title so as to unite his preconceptions on the subject with its estranged identity in the act of epiphanic revelation. It is a powerful lesson, both in terms of an exercise in imagination and in terms of religious teaching, the lesson about which Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* spoke: “Most smart sayings are derived from metaphor, and also from misleading the hearer beforehand. For it becomes more evident to him that he has learnt something, when the conclusion turns out contrary to his expectations, and the mind seems to say, ‘How true it is! But I missed it.’ [...] And clever riddles are agreeable for the same reason; for something is learnt, and the expressions is also metaphorical.”⁷

Therefore, we arrive at the first transformation of the riddle concept in Aldhelm. It occurs on the level of individual riddles, where it is no longer the subject which is unknown and disguised but the clues to its understanding; it is there where the solving takes place. The true challenge lies in being able to imagine the subject as described by the poet, to see the connections between the metaphors and metonymies used by the riddler and the object. This mechanism was intensified by Aldhelm’s sophisticated etymologising, a practice

⁵ *The Riddles of Aldhelm*, ed. and trans. James Hall Pitman (New Haven: Archon Books, 1970), pp. 2–3, ll. 6–9.

⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, “The Two Kings and Two Labyrinths,” in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1999), p. 263.

⁷ Aristotle, p. 409.

common for early medieval learning and the one which frequently formed the foundation of medieval knowledge. The most well-known example of it are 7th-century encyclopedic *Etymologiae* by Isidore of Seville. The etymologising employed in Aldhelm's enigmas is based on Isidore and adds to their linguistic potential, sometimes verging on the wordplay between the enigma and its title. Nicholas Howe regards it as one of the formative ideas behind Aldhelmian riddles: "Aldhelm delights in the articulation of the linguistic riddle stated by the title, while Isidore delights in solving the linguistic riddle of the word's etymology. The underlying relation between the two – riddle as word, word as riddle – becomes evident as one traces Aldhelm's frequent technique of reframing Isidore's etymological matter to form a riddle."⁸ Both Aldhelm and Isidore engage in the fabric of meaning symbolised and contained in names. Isidore's etymological study centres on the name itself as the element comprising the potential for understanding a given thing. Aldhelm seems to reverse this process, since for him it is the understanding of a given thing, enabled by his clues, which directs the audience to its name, positioned, *nota bene*, above the riddle. Whatever the approach, the metaphysical element of the meaning and the name as coming from "above," from God, is affirmed in both authors. Aldhelm and Isidore undertake the fascinating task of attempting to detect the true enigmas set and concealed by the supreme agent, both meeting at the point where the riddle-like encounters the learning. Subsequently, both the etymological and theological approaches to the enigmas prove the fact that the riddlic character of Aldhelm's work is located not where one would traditionally seek it, that is *not* in the straightforward search for the riddles' camouflaged identities.

A corresponding mechanism yet on a larger scale can be observed in Aldhelm's anthology as a whole. Initially it appears as a heterogeneous, not to say chaotic, arrangement of topics which seemingly are unconnected with one another; for example the "Bellows" riddle is preceded by the "Dog" riddle and the "Serpent" is followed by the "Bookcase." Such an attitude, however, would necessarily be of simplistic and shallow nature. The logical result of the riddlic transformation discussed above is that nothing is insignificant. In the words of a 12th-century theologian and philosopher, Alain de Lille: *omnis mundi creatura quasi liber et pictura nobis est et speculum*, "every creature in the world is, for us, like a book and a picture and a mirror as well."⁹ Consequently, the symbolic in Aldhelm is enclosed not only in particular elements within indi-

⁸ Nicholas Howe, "Aldhelm's Enigmata and Isidorian Etymology," in *Anglo-Saxon England*, eds. Peter Clemoes, Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, Vol. 14 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 39.

⁹ Alain de Lille, *Rhythmus alter*, quoted in Dale Coulter, "Pseudo-Dionysius in the Twelfth-Century Latin West", *The ORB Online Encyclopedia* (<http://orb.rhodes.edu/encyclop/culture/Philos/coulter.html>).

vidual enigmas but also in the entire collection composed of particular riddles. The “Creation” enigma closing the collection is a clear allusion to the diversity of themes employed by the enigmatographer, for it is an all-encompassing force, the divine Logos. Its final lines, posing the question as to the identity concealed in the riddle, can be also read as challenging the reader/listener as to the meaning of the whole collection: “*Sciscitor inflatos, fungar quo nomine, sofos.* [Now I ask/Puffed up philosophers what name I bear.]”¹⁰ The “say what I am” challenge is posed not only by the “who” or “what” questions, but also by the question “why.” In other words, the mystery of the collection is also formed by the other type of transformation of the riddlic formula. The enigma is enclosed in the shrouded reasons why these and not other riddles constitute the anthology, and what the significance of their spatial arrangement is.

A closer reading of Aldhelm’s enigmas confirms the assumptions I have demonstrated so far. Aldhelm creates a grand construction spanning his riddles, immediately transporting the audience from the playful form into the questions of power, creation and fate. The *Aenigmata* open with five natural riddles, “Terra” (“Earth”), “Ventus” (“Wind”), “Nubes” (“Cloud”), “Natura” (“Natural Force”), “Iris” (“Rainbow”) followed by “Luna” (“Moon”), “Fatum” (“Fate”) and “Pliades” (“Pleiades”). The elements, intertwined with nature and fate commanding over them, are placed underneath the firmament, establishing the ingredients of and the theatre for the enigmas of the collection. The whole work is completed by the above-mentioned supreme enigma, the remarkably long and complex riddle C “Creatura” (“Creation”). Aldhelm himself, although in a veiled way, mentions the dome-like, all-enclosing structure he designed, in an enigma, appearing to be jutting out from the others, no. LV “Crismal” (“Ciborium”). It is there that I see Aldhelm revealing his structure in a metaphorical understanding of the vessel containing the Hosts. As each Host accommodates Christ so does each thing, described by Aldhelm, involve Christ’s presence, communicating its own and His splendour. The vessel is likened to a temple of God just as the world itself can be compared to one and both, the vessel and the *Aenigmata*, *floret gloria rerum*, “bloom[s] with the glory of things”:

Candida sanctorum sic floret gloria rerum,
Nec trabis in templo, surgunt nec tecta columnis.

[...] thus holy things
Reveal their glory. Here no timbers are;
No columns rise to bear this temple’s dome.¹¹

¹⁰ Pitman, pp. 66–67, l. 83.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31, ll. 8–9.

Nonetheless, the hundredth riddle of Aldhelm is a giant, clear and definite conclusion to the *Aenigmata*, at the same time including all of their possible aspects, simultaneously being one thing and its exact opposite:

Grossas et graciles rerum comprehenso figuras.
 Altior, en, cælo rimor secreta Tonantis
 Et tamen inferior terris tetra Tartara cerno;

All shapes, both gross and graceful, I comprise.
 Lo, higher than heaven, the secrets I explore
 Of thundering God, yet, lower than the earth,
 [I] Gaze on foul hell;¹²

Employing the rhetoric used by the Creation, the enigma seems to present Aldhelm's ultimate solution and ultimate riddle, ending with the challenge to the *inflatos sofos*, "puffed-up philosophers," not so much to discover its name but rather to discover the holy Creation as permeating all the preceding riddles. This challenge is anteceded by a warning, which I understand as referring to the riddles as well, to *[a]uscultate mei credentes famina verbi* (l. 80), "hear and believe the words of my utterance," which in fact are the very riddles, because *[e]t tamen infitians non retur frivola lector* (l. 82), "the doubting reader should not think of them as worthless." The Creation, understood by Aldhelm as subject only to *rerum genitor* (l. 64), "the creator of all things," whose *mundum sermone coercens* (l. 64), "word commands the world," is really arching over the entire collection, infiltrating all of its items with the divine Logos.

In general, Aldhelm seems to be fascinated with the way in which the particular components of reality infiltrate one another. This infiltration takes place on various levels, beginning with the foremost level of the divine participation in everything by means of the *Creatura*, an agent analogous to the Logos which is permeating the elements. The elements, in turn, permeate the actual riddle items, which eventually penetrate one another. Everything, Aldhelm appears to be claiming, is interconnected and forms an ever-changing entity, revolving around God. Such is the mixture of the elements in one riddle which appears in the middle of the collection and which, one would say, stands not only for *Lebes*, "Cauldron," but also for the vessel in which things are conceived and from which they are born, a metaphor for the universe as it is. Placed in the middle of the collection, focused on transmutability and being concerned with the opposites, enigma XLIX is thus the support of the arch extending from the opening to the close of the *Aenigmata*:

¹² Ibid., pp. 62–63, ll. 20–23.

Horrida, curva, capax, patulis fabricata metallis
 Pendeo nec cælum tangens terramve profundam,
 Ignibus ardescens necnon et gurgite fervens;
 Sic geminas vario patior discrimine pugnas,
 Dum latices limphæ tolero flammasque feroces.

Ugly, capacious, round, of flattened bronze,
 I hang suspended, touching neither heaven
 Nor lowly earth. I glow with fires, and seethe
 With eddying billows; thus a twofold war
 Of varying risks I bear, as I endure
 The limpid waters and ferocious flames.¹³

A powerful mixture of the principles, the amalgam of the beautiful with the ugly, the celestial with the infernal, brings to mind the oxymoronic statements of the final enigma. Similarly, the presence of the four elements generates a conspicuous connection with the enigmas situated in the opening folios of the *Aenigmata*. Bearing a close resemblance to the cauldron riddle is another enigma located in almost immediate proximity to it. Riddle LIV “Cocuma Duplex,” (“Double Cooking-vessel”), seems, at first, to be reasserting the thesis of the paradoxical presence of antagonistic elements, but it is also expanding it by pointing to their productive power. Through their coalescence, brimming with militant images, the peace and benefit of food is achieved. In addition to this, the enigma is topped with questions involving the paradox of contradictory elements functioning as one, again, much in the fashion of the final riddle, whose title is also the answer to them:

Crederè quis poterit tantis spectacul;a causis
 Temperet et fatis rerum contraria fata?
 Ecce larem, laticem quoque gesto in viscere ventris,
 Nec tamen undantes vincunt incendia limphæ
 Ignibus aut atris siccantur flumina fontis,
 Fœdera sed pacis sunt flammas inter et undas;
 Malleus in primo memet formabat et incus.

Who could believe such causes wrought this sight,
 Who reconcile such contradictory lots
 With common laws of Nature? Lo, I bear
 Within my hollow belly fire and flood;
 Yet billowing water may not quench the flames,
 Nor may dire heat dry up the welling streams,
 For wave and flame have made a pact of peace.
 Hammer and anvil long since shaped me thus.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid., pp. 26–27.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 30–31.

Thus individual riddles go beyond their separate identities and generate one organism. The *e pluribus unum* rhetoric of the work is echoed in its structure, varied as the universe it is attempting to portray but focused on the common scheme of mutual interdependency and interconnectedness between the components of that universe. All that created an elaborate and interlocking web of connections which could be compared to Anglo-Saxon visual arts where illuminations form intricate knotwork designs. Both there and in Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* the main motifs emerge from underneath the net of tangled elements weaving, intertwining and blending one into another.

The *Aenigmata* are abundant in the elements which serve to bridge the discussed above contextual groups within the collection. Detecting such ties, created on metonymic and metaphorical levels, itself adds to the riddlic character of the anthology. The spatial limitations of this essay do not allow for an exhaustive analysis of the intricate web of meanings woven by Aldhelm, I shall, therefore attempt to present only some of the most prominent examples of such interdependencies. The connections between Aldhelmian enigmas appear, as I have noted above, both between those positioned in close proximity to one another as well as between those divided by considerable distances. Some of them are strikingly explicit, as obvious as they could only be, yet some of the connections are truly labyrinthine and their discovery indeed appears as a revelation, as a moment of epiphany comparable to that following a successful resolving of a riddle. Therefore the question "why" concerning not only the choice of topics but also their spatial arrangement in the whole text seems only natural and the discovery of connections, "bridges," spanning the enigmas' topics is the outcome of such communication with the reader/listener. Aldhelm's riddles follow the paradigm pertaining not only to other literary riddles but also to other texts: that in which meaning becomes the outcome of the relationship between the text and the erudition of the reader. The message is then formed, so to speak, in between, a process which is congruous with Wolfgang Iser's view of the textual meaning described by him as:

[A] mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment. What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves. Hence, the structured blanks of the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text.¹⁵

¹⁵ Wolfgang Iser, "Interaction Between Text and Reader," quoted in *Critical Theory and Practice: A Coursebook*, eds. Keith Green and Jill LeBihan (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 209.

The reader's "process of ideation" of the entirety of Aldhelm's collection can be perceived as animated first by the bridging of the gaps within individual riddles and then as the ideation of the associations between them as entities. Therefore the study of such associations seems to me as significant for the understanding of the collection's potential as the study of the individual enigmas.

The relations observable within the enigmas of the collection operate on two levels, structural and semantic. Following Jakobson's division of linguistic structure, the structural level of the connections appears to function on the basis of the similarity (metaphors) and the contiguity (metonymies) of semantic elements displayed by the enigmas. On the level of semantic analysis the associations are constructed by riddles belonging to common categories, such as animals, plants, natural phenomena; by the use of common motifs in riddles, such as the usage of cosmology or the elements; and by riddles resorting to the sphere of Christian symbolism. The connections based on the collection's typology or motifs shared by particular riddles are evidently contiguous and thus are built as metonymies or synecdoches, whereas the connections created by Christian symbolism are evidently metaphoric. It is not always possible to demarcate the connections as clear-cut examples of one particular class. On the contrary, the boundaries of their classes are frequently crossed causing them to merge with one another, eventually creating an even tighter net of dependencies. Similarly, the forms by means of which the connections are introduced also seem to reflect the idea of the text as mirroring the world's mutually dependent and entwined structure, where the tangible combines with the symbolic and where the traces of the divine demiurge are ubiquitously diffused. Moreover, not only are the connections built on various levels of affinities shared by the enigmas, but they also are composed as reciprocal antitheses. At this point let me introduce the category of grafting which, in the context of Aldhelmian riddles, I intend to present as twofold. By grafting I mean the examples of such connections where an idea or an element employed in one riddle appears to give rise to another enigma. This process can be seen as being of positive or negative nature: riddles can either stem out of one another by means of direct affinities (positive grafting) or they can be derived from one another by means of direct opposites (negative grafting). The instances of positive grafting bring to mind the idea of divine order and are opposed by the disorder generated by those stimulated by negative grafting. At the very same time it must be made clear that neither of the two types of grafting should be understood as superior or inferior to one another. Both forms merely complement each other and resemble the symbolic image of the opposed, yet complementary elements of the cooking pot from riddle LIV.

As the connections based on cosmology and the elements have already been mentioned in the discussion of the overall structure of the *Aenigmata*, and as

the associations constructed on categorial contiguity are frequently self evident, let us concentrate on the method of grafting. Aldhelm's grafting as a technique of linking his enigmas is visible particularly well in those of their groups which were constructed on the grounds of most immediate similarities between their attributes. Without doubt, close affinities are primarily the trait of those riddles which are consolidated by their common category. Nonetheless, Aldhelm, as I have already attempted to prove, was capable of much more intricate and less straightforward associations. An example of his true riddlic skill can be noted in three, bearing no apparent semblance, riddles, LIX "Penna," ("Pen"), LX "Monocerus," ("Unicorn") and LXI "Pugio," ("Dagger"). The key to the riddle of the enigmas' proximity appears to me as hidden on two levels, external and deeply internal or, I should rather say, symbolic. Externally it is the shape of the three objects which positively grafts the riddles in one another: the elongated silhouette of the pen is mirrored in the most prominent feature making a unicorn a unicorn, its long spiralled horn. Finally, the outline of the dagger completes the threefold pattern. And, in reverse, it is precisely the dagger's shape which encapsulates the solution to the second interpretation, for daggers, just like swords, are in the form of crosses. Naturally and congruously with Christian rhetoric then, there arise the associations with Christ, whose suffering is symbolised by the dagger,¹⁶ and whose very person is represented by the unicorn¹⁷ and the pelican, the original owner of the pen. Thus the connection functions here as a system of metaphors.

An allied, although maybe even more elusive, correspondence weaves itself through four other enigmas, nos. XXX-XXXIII. The "Elementum" ("Alphabet"), "Ciconia" ("Stork"), "Pugillares" ("Writing-tablets") and "Lorica" ("Cuirass/Breast-plate") can be associated also on grounds of the similarities of their appearances as well as certain attributes, analogous to them. The connections are interlaced and are not fully common to the whole group as one unifying idea. Instead, they again employ positive grafting and emanate from their antecedents. The alphabet of riddle XXX cunningly and incredibly appears in the stork riddle (XXXI), which, according to the Christian symbolism, is associated with the holy letter X.¹⁸ The writing-tablets are associated with writing *per se*, employing a Christian hyperbole in [*s*]ed *semen segiti de caelo ducitur almum*, "from heaven unto that field [i.e. the tablets themselves] is borne the seed."¹⁹ Yet the enigma of the writing tablets engages also a military allegory: [*h*]eu! *tam sancta seges diris extinguitur armis* (l. 8), "alas, this holy

¹⁶ Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli* ["A Dictionary of Symbols"], (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1990), pp. 223, 258.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁸ The letter is formed by its open beak and crossed legs. Cf. Kopaliński, p. 29.

¹⁹ Pitman, pp. 18-19, l. 6.

harvest is destroyed by fierce weapons,” which creates an immediate link with the subsequent breast-plate riddle. Not only does it physically resemble the writing-tablets, but it finishes with the statement metaphorically answering the lament of the preceding enigma: [s]*picula non vereor longis exempta faretris*, “no arrow in the quiver frightens me.”²⁰ Thus, an elaborate allegory may be tentatively observed as arising from the group: Christian writing which will withstand the attacks of its enemies.

The connections basing on the analogous features of the described objects can be formulated not only on affinities but also on contrarities between them, thus employing the paradigm previously marked as negative grafting. A conspicuous illustration is provided by two riddles whose objects share only one property, both have feathers. Apart from it, riddles XLI “Pulvillus” (“Pillow”) and XLII “Strutio” (“Ostrich”) are completely dissimilar and the difference lies in the celestial dimension. The pillow says that [c]*elsior ad superas possum turgescere nubes*, “high, towards the clouds of heaven, at times I swell,”²¹ whereas the ostrich laments its plight: [s]*ed potius pedibus spatior per squalida rura*, “rather, I must pace/on foot through dirty fields.”²² Here, then, the tie is negatively grafted in the succeeding enigma. It is not made by the things converging to a common point, denoted here by the possession of feathers, but rather by diverging from it, moving in totally contrastive directions.

As the technique of grafting is widely used to compose the particular structures within the *Aenigmata*, so is the idea of binary oppositions, related to the concept of negative grafting. The binary oppositions are constructed on a larger scale than the ties employing the negative grafting, usually encompassing whole entities of the riddles in question. Such contrastive comparisons can be noted in the interrelations woven by the most substantial and elevated concepts, that is those stemming from the Scriptures. Possibly the most obvious of them is positioning riddle LXIII “Corbus” (“Raven”), immediately before riddle LXIV “Columba” (“Dove”). The riddle of their mutual location is self-evident, for both enigmas are not only juxtaposed in terms of the symbolism of their colours but also as the birds released by Noah during the Flood, the fact to which both of the enigmas refer in their texts. They are set in opposition as the raven is an example of disobeying Noah, whereas the dove returned to him bringing the symbol of good hope. A more intricate exemplar is to be found between riddle LXXI “Piscis” (“Fish”), and riddle LXXII “Colosus” (“Colossus”). This time the connection is not directly based on the Bible but rather on the juxtaposition of the might of the divine Creator with that of man. The colossal difference in size and importance does not diminish the miracle of creation in

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 18–19, l. 7.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 22–23, l. 3.

²² Ibid., Riddle XLII, l. 4.

the fish. Although [*m*]e *pedibus manisbusque simul fraudaverat almus / Arbitrator...*, “[t]he Lord Creator both of feet and hands/[d]efrauded me...”²³ the fish is still incomparably more intricate than the Colossus, which, opening with a clear reference to limbs as well, witnesses the futility of human attempts to emulate God:

Omnia membra mihi plasmavit corporis auctor,
Nec tamen ex isdem membrorum munia sumpsit, [...]
Heu! Frustra factor confixit corpus inorme,
Totis membrorum dum frauder sensibus intus.

My body's maker moulded all my parts,
Yet I no service from my members get [...]
Alas! In vain my maker fashioned me
A form enormous, since within that form
I lack all feeling in my various parts.²⁴

Finally, let us consider what I believe to be the most supreme of all the interdependencies carefully constructed by Aldhelm. The phenomenon takes place between riddles LXVI and LXX and, like the two connections described immediately above, resorts to Christian rhetoric. The group is composed of three items, LXVI “Mola” (“Millstone”), LXVII “Cribellus” (“Flour-sieve”) and LXX “Tortella” (“Loaf of Bread”). The logical order of milling grain, producing flour, which is then sieved and eventually baked into bread is self evident. The unclear element, however, is Aldhelm's decision to postpone the appearance of the bread until riddle 70, placing it only after two, absolutely unconnected with it, enigmas nos. 68 “Trumpet,” and 69 “Yew-tree.” I am inclined to believe, however, that the puzzle is resolved when the opening and the final lines of the bread riddle are scrutinized:

De terris orior candenti corpore pelta [...]
Vix artus animæque carerent tramie mortis,
Ni forsan validis refrager viribus Orco.

From earth I rise, a shield of shining white [...]
Scarce would a soul escape the Stygian way,
If I with sturdy strength opposed not death.²⁵

The image of “rising from the earth” and “opposing death” united with the manifestly Christian symbolism of bread make this enigma an allegory of Christ, which is reinforced by the metaphorical connection offered by the piece di-

²³ Ibid., pp. 40–41, ll. 1–2.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 42–43, ll. 1–2, 7–8.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 40–41, ll. 1, 6–7.

rectly following it and describing a fish, enigma LXXI, one more symbol of Christ. The allegory would not come as unusual had it not been for the fact that the bread riddle is the third enigma after the flour-sieve enigma, which finishes with the very telling lines: [*l*]iquitur in prunis numquam torrentibus hæc nix, / [s]ed, mirum dictu, magis indurescit ad ignem, "in glowing coals this snow will never melt; / nay, fire miraculously hardens it,"²⁶ a clear reference to Christ's brief sojourn in hell after his death. Everything becomes clear and the group is revealed not only as an allegory of Christ, but as an allegory of his life, death, the harrowing of hell and, finally, resurrection. It is even more interesting as Aldhelm resorts to the subtle numerical stratagem of postponing the advent of Christ by two riddles, as if representing the two days dividing Christ's death and triumph, and thus symbolically repeating the message of the Gospel.

The brief inquiry into Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* that I have attempted to present was focused on demonstrating the processes by means of which the riddle form, although outwardly associated with the playful side of human existence, acquired multifaceted significance. The transformations of the riddle formula in Aldhelm's work which I have outlined, transfigure his collection into a total enigma, where every element contributes to the sense of mystery infiltrating the work on every possible level, from individual riddles to their clusters, eventually leading to its general solution as the praise of divine creation. The metamorphosis of the common sense of the concept functions on the level of individual riddles, where the enigmatic shifts from the mere search for the estranged identity to the search for a new, Christian insight into the subject. At the same time this shift works in the collection treated as an entity, which, due to the fact that the enigmatic is involved in joining the riddles, is to be understood as a model of a Christian view of the universe.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39, ll. 8–9.