The Anglo-Saxon Origins of Churchill's Elocutio: "We Shall Fight on the Beaches"

MICHAEL FOX

ABSTRACT

Winston Churchill's "We shall fight on the beaches"[1] is one of the best-known speeches of the twentieth century, yet the speech has not been closely analyzed for its rhetorical features and possible sources and models. This essay looks at the conclusion to the speech and suggests that, although Churchill's known and stated views and influences, such as his fondness for short, old words, his opinions in "The Scaffolding of Rhetoric," and the model of William Bourke Cockran, are important, the speech's rhetorical style and subject matter are shaped by the Old English writers Ælfric and Wulfstan and by Churchill's knowledge of Anglo-Saxon history.

Keywords: Churchill, elocutio, Anglo-Saxon rhetoric, Ælfric, Wulfstan

On June 4, 1940, not long after the evacuation at Dunkirk, Winston

Churchill delivered his well-known "We shall fight on the beaches" speech to parliament. Churchill had been First Lord of the Admiralty since September 1939, when Britain declared war, and had, therefore, already been "an interpreter of the war to the British people and to global opinion" (Toye 27). Churchill became Prime Minister on May 10, 1940, after Neville Chamberlain resigned following several days of meetings known as the "Norway Debate," ostensibly about the failings of British efforts in Norway, but ultimately about a lack of confidence in Chamberlain's government. Churchill was not a unanimously popular choice for the office, even among members of his own Conservative party (Johnson 15). On May 29, Churchill had to convince members of the War Cabinet not to seek terms with Hitler, all while the evacuation of British forces from Dunkirk, which had begun on May 26, was underway (Gilbert, *Continue to Pester* 21–23; Johnson 11–20). On June 4, 1940, then, Churchill had been Prime Minister for less than four weeks. He did not have the confidence of many at home. To say that the war effort had been going badly would be an understatement. He was "fighting for his political life and credibility" (Johnson 22; Toye 42), and the speech must be understood with the situation in mind: Churchill needed to inspire confidence among his colleagues in the House of Commons and among the peoples of Britain, to prepare his country for a protracted fight, to shore up the resolve of France, and to demonstrate to many key players (mainly Hitler and the United States) his determination to continue the war, all while, so far as possible, accurately reporting the facts (Maguire 258–59; Cannadine 11).[2]

The speech, though often admired, has never been closely analyzed in terms of the rhetorical canon of style. Most recently, Lori Maguire looks at audiences, contexts, and the reception of the

speech under such headings of dispositio as confirmatio, refutatio, and peroratio, but apart from a brief section on language (260-62), Maguire does not consider elocutio, and her comments on language do not focus on the "we shall fight" sequence of the speech. (See Maguire 269-75, however, on the historical context and significance of the passage generally.) Of course, handbooks of rhetoric and guides to writing do often mention the speech. Most commonly, the mention is brief and addresses only the conclusion: the sequence of "we shall" clauses is cited as an example of anaphora (e.g., *Rhetorical Devices* 186; Keith and Lundberg 64). The *Business Communication* volume of the *Harvard Business Essentials* series generalizes the effect slightly by naming it "parallel structure," suggesting that it "helps audiences hear and remember what we have to say" (85), but the text does not specify exactly what constitutes "parallel structure" (i.e., whether or not the parallel structure is only in the repetition of "we shall" clauses or if other structures in the passage cited are also to be considered "parallel"). Other texts treat the concluding passage in somewhat more detail. Joseph Williams and Ira Nadel, for example, in discussing "climactic emphasis," use part of the final sentence of the speech ("the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old") to illustrate the weight of nominalizations. As Williams and Nadel put it, instead of "banally" and "simply" writing "until the New World rescues us," "Churchill end[s] with a parallelism climaxed by a balanced pair of heavy nominalizations" (152-53; Farnsworth 30-31).

The diction of the "we shall" portion of the passage has also received some attention. Several readers have noted a preponderance of Anglo-Saxon words and the notable use of the French loan "surrender" at the passage's conclusion. Bill Stott further suggests that Churchill balances a Latinate word ("confidence") with a

"primitive monosyllable" ("strength"), but does not explore these possible juxtapositions further (Bragg 8; Lacey and Danziger 30; Stott 84). Examples could be multiplied, but, even though the conclusion to the speech is well known, observations about Churchill's style tend to be brief and, except for comments on word choice, ignore how and under what influences Churchill might have composed those famous lines. An extended study of Churchill's style and his English sources will demonstrate that the best explanation for the unique features of the speech is that Churchill was paying particular attention to history: he carefully situated his speech in a tradition of English rhetoric about the island's attack and defence and then strove to highlight native Germanic vocabulary and to use verse-like structures, doublets, and alliteration in order to echo the rhetoric of Anglo-Saxon authors such as Ælfric and Wulfstan.

The first impediment to a more thorough investigation is access to and historical pinpointing of the text of the speech itself. Because Parliament refused to allow Churchill's speeches to the House of Commons to be broadcast and because Churchill did not broadcast this speech separately, we cannot be certain about the precise form of the original performance (Gilbert, *Continue to Pester* 38; Toye 231). At least three versions of the speech exist: (1) the typescript in the Churchill Archives; (2) the script at the official site www.winstonchurchill.org; and (3) the audio of Churchill reading the speech, recorded after the war.[3] Only the post-war recording reveals substantial differences in the conclusion of the speech,missing an entire paragraph. This essay is based upon the version at winstonchurchill.org, mainly because this is easiest for general access. (See Table 1 for a comparison of the three versions).

Churchill's speech concludes as follows, though, for ease of reference

and to highlight the structure of the passage, I have altered the format (and punctuation) from the continuous prose of the original typescript and the winstonchurchill.org version:[4]

The British Empire and the French Republic, linked together in their cause and in their need, will defend to the death their native soil, aiding each other like good comrades to the utmost of their strength.

Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule,

we shall not flag or fail. (1)

We shall go on to the end. (2)

We shall fight in France. (3)

We shall fight on the seas and oceans. (4)

We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. (5)

We shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be. (6)

We shall fight on the beaches. (7)

We shall fight on the landing grounds. (8)

We shall fight in the fields and in the streets. (9)

We shall fight in the hills. (10)

We shall never surrender. (11)

And even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond

the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.

Repetition is obviously the key rhetorical feature of the passage. Jonathan Charteris-Black assesses the effect—"Repetition of 'we' implies unity of purpose and 'shall' clearly predicts the future . . . repetition implies physical and mental obduracy"—and characterizes each of the main repetitions as "WE + SHALL + 'MILITARY' VERB + LOCATION" (56). Specifically, of course, that repetition is anaphora, the repeated beginnings of sentences and clauses with "we shall," particularly "we shall fight." There are eleven "we shall" clauses in the passage, and given that many of them are roughly the same length, one could also argue for the use of isocolon here and many other figures of repetition, such as, for example, the general term conduplicatio (repetition, or literally doubling), though such terms do not fit as well. The long list of places the English are prepared to fight might be seen to have the effect of a litany, but Ward Farnsworth notes how the locations introduce variation: Farnsworth sees "relief," "abandonment," or "irregularity" in the "internal varieties" of the anaphora that slowly move the focus of the fight from France to upon the water, into the air, to the island, to the beaches, to the landing grounds, to the fields and streets, and to the hills (30–31; Maguire 272). In increments, Churchill pauses at each point of retreat until the fight could be in the very hills of England, a retreat and stubborn resistance which bears a striking resemblance to Bede's account of the fifth-century Germanic conquest of England, as we shall see.

The passage, however, is more intricately constructed than has generally been recognized, with patterned repetition in the "we

shall" sequence, parallel and chiastic structures in the passage as a whole, deliberately patterned word choice, a purposeful use of coordinate structures or doublets, and alliteration. First, in the eleven repetitions of "we shall," the first and last instances are presented negatively—"we shall not" and "we shall never"—and the whole series balances around and therefore emphasizes the central iteration: "We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be." Generally, also, the length of the clauses or sentences grows, from "in France" to "on the seas and oceans" to "with growing confidence and growing strength in the Air," before shortening again in the middle and at the end, creating a pattern which is almost chiastic (or enveloped)[5] in its short statements at each end, but which is certainly internally parallel in the relative lengths of occurrences 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, 7, 8, 9. Iterations 1 and 2 could be isolated before a set of three lengthening sequences (3, 4, 5); 6 stands alone before another set of three lengthening sequences (7, 8, 9); and 10, 11 parallel 1 and 2 in their brevity, making a perfectly balanced 11 iterations.

Further, the initial "we shall not flag or fail" (1) links back to "have fallen or may fall," itself an example of polyptoton (that is, repetition of a word in a different form), echoing the two possibilities expressed by the modals "have" and "may" with the coordinated "flag or fail." Further, the four /f/ verbs in the first sentence ("have fallen," "may fall," "flag," and "fail") lead us to the most important /f/ verb, "fight," which appears three times before a break and appears four times again in occurrences 7–10 of the "we shall" series, effectively negating the possibilities of the prior /f/ verbs.

The whole of the passage is also chiastic, demonstrating what some would call an "envelope pattern" from "old" in "old and famous

states" of the opening to the "Old" at the conclusion, functioning within a parallelism of "even though" and "even if" statements which bracket the sequence of eleven "we shall" clauses. Even the brief passage cited above by Williams and Nadel is chiastic, moving from "New" to "power and might" to "rescue and liberation" and back to "Old." The envelope patterns highlight the full passage and the "we shall" sequence as separate and significant, and the chiastic and parallel structures echo the highly formalized structures of traditional oral-formulaic composition, a tradition which includes Old English poetry.

The diction of the passage is also significant for the way it reinforces the themes of the speech. The words are generally short, simple, direct, and without ambiguity. In fact, there are only eight words in the entire passage which have more than two syllables ("Gestapo"; "odious"; "apparatus"; "confidence"; "whatever"; "surrender"; "subjugated"; and "liberation") and, though the elements of "whatever" are Germanic in origin, the word itself is a late compound, meaning that all the multisyllabic words are of French or Latin origin or are later additions to the language. In his choice of vocabulary, Churchill has not only attempted to use simple, unadorned language,[6] but he has also, I would argue, used an intuitive or perhaps learned sense of what constitutes native vocabulary.

For example, a coordinate structure like "subjugated and starving" is a characteristically well-chosen alliterative doublet: the former word has a clear Latin origin (fifteenth century) while the latter is as clearly a Germanic word, an Old English (OE) word, from the Proto-Germanic (PG) *sterban* and OE *steorfan*, "to die," a word whose meaning has weakened since the OE period, like so many

OE verbs meaning roughly "to kill" or "to die."[7] Churchill may well have been aware of the word's origin, but even if he were not, the Latin multisyllabic "subjugate" with the Germanic monosyllabic "starve" is an effective juxtaposition both syllabically and phonetically. The same is ultimately true of "armed and guarded," at least in form, as "armed" is closely related to PG *armaz* and OE *earm* (the noun meaning "arm"), though the specific verbal sense "to furnish with weapons" seems to be an early borrowing from either Old French (OF), *armer*, or Latin, *armare*; "guard" comes via OF, though descended from the PG *wardōn*, "to guard" (the "gu" for /g/ marks the word immediately as French). "Flag or fail" similarly combines words with Germanic ("flag" is likely a late borrowing from Old Norse [ON] *flaka* "to flicker, flutter") and French origins ("fail" from OF *falir*, "to be unsuccessful in executing a task"), and "seas and oceans" combines OE *sǣ* (PG *saiwaz*) with a late thirteenth-century entry from OF, *occean*, from Latin *Oceanus*. The list goes on, including "confidence and strength" and "power and might," both combinations of native, Germanic words with words ultimately of Latin origin which entered English (in these two cases) via Middle French and Old French, respectively. The pattern, however, is not perfect, as "fields and streets" are both native words, but this too seems deliberate: "fields and streets" is part of the final five "we shall" clauses, where after the non-native word "cost," the only other loan is the French loan "surrender," which is, as Stott points out "not a nice word" (Bragg 8; Stott 84). The last paired words, "rescue" and "liberation," though appropriately contrastive syllabically, are in fact both from Latin via French, thought the phones of "rescue" seem almost Germanic. Further, the French/Latin with Germanic pairings may have been intended to reinforce a theme of the speech, as Churchill has previously stressed how Britain

and France will work together: "The British Empire and the French Republic, linked together in their cause and in their need, will defend to the death their native soil, aiding each other like good comrades to the utmost of their strength." Even here, "cause" and "need" are (chiastically reversing "British Empire" and "French Republic") from French and PG/OE, respectively.

The linking of different parts of the passage (and the speech as a whole) operates at a high level of sophistication: for example, "confidence" and "strength" begin and end the first paragraph of the conclusion, then appear together in iteration 5 of the "we shall" sequence.[8] The central and crucial "we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be" has been introduced by "we shall prove ourselves once again able to defend our island home" (a parallel structure of "we shall," "defend," and "island") and also in the united efforts of Britain and France mentioned above: "The British Empire and the French Republic … will defend to the death their native soil" (also "[we] … will," "defend," "native soil"), but the latter looks forward to "whatever the cost may be" by introducing "to the death" in a sequence which has chiasmus embedded in the parallel structure ("defend [a] to the death [b] their native soil [c]" and "defend [a] our Island [c], whatever the cost may be [b]").

In addition to the careful word choice, apparent awareness of etymology, and sophisticated patterning the passage seems to exhibit, a feature which has never (so far as I have been able to find) been isolated and discussed is what I have so far called the "coordinate structures" or "doublets" of the passage, in which two words, usually two nouns or two verbs, are linked by a coordinating "and" or "or." I count nine such instances of note, several of which also alliterate:

have fallen or may fall

flag or fail

seas and oceans

growing confidence and growing strength

in the fields and in the streets

subjugated and starving

armed and guarded

power and might

rescue and liberation

Finally, alliteration is an obvious feature of the passage, but one might not readily notice how alliteration functions to link or structure the passage, as, for example, with "into the grip of the Gestapo" and "in God's good time," in the same way that the coordinate verb structures of the first "sentence"—"have fallen or may fall" and "flag or fail"—are repeated in "subjugated and starving" and "armed and guarded" in the last "sentence."

Clearly, the conclusion of Churchill's "We shall fight on the beaches" is rhetorically sophisticated. Paradoxically, that sophistication is, in my view, proven by the manuscript appearance of this portion of the script of the speech. Whereas many of Churchill's speeches are laid out in short phrases and clauses, like free verse, as many have said (Hayward 22; Watts 99), the "we shall" sequence is not, suggesting that its content and form had been given such attention that Churchill had no need for visual cues.[9] In fact, the minor discrepancies between the archived version of the speech

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and the audio of its presentation would suggest the same thing. A question presents itself: where did Churchill find a model for this particular "style"? The answer may be found in considering Churchill's education, the speaker he says influenced him most, and his early essay on rhetoric.

Churchill's education, first of all, is recounted in some detail in his autobiography, *My Early Life*, which was first published in 1930. Churchill takes some pride in being in the lowest division of the bottom form at Harrow, suggesting that students of his ability were considered "dunces," able to learn only English and not Latin or Greek. That focus on English, Churchill claims, was an "immense advantage": "Not only did we learn English parsing thoroughly, but we also practiced continually English analysis . . . Thus I got into my bones the essential structure of the ordinary British sentence—which is a noble thing" (30-31). While the focus of Churchill's language training may indeed have been English, the level of his facility in Latin is unclear. Churchill definitely began to learn Latin at St James's School (Churchill mentions his initial exposure to the Latin singular first declension noun *mensa*), and he later talks about his Latin translations at Harrow (he had an "arrangement" with a boy who was excellent at Latin translations, but who struggled with English essays), though Latin was not one of the exams he passed to get into Sandhurst. Churchill says of the Sandhurst exams: "Latin I could not learn. I had a rooted prejudice which seemed to close my mind against it" (39). Of Latin and Greek learning overall, he comments further that "[i]n all the twelve years I was at school, no one ever succeeded in making me write a Latin verse or learn any Greek except the alphabet" (27). However, Churchill's preference for "English" over Latin seems to colour his remarks about Latin, and, I suspect, to lead him to downplay how

much Latin he knew. He continued to have to do Latin translations of "ten or fifteen lines" per day, and he even had private tutelage from the Head-master for a time (35–36). Though he was perhaps unable to compose Latin verse, I believe Churchill would have acquired a basic competency in Latin (see also Johnson 79), a fact which will prove relevant below.

When asked about his oratorical style in the early 1950s, Churchill reportedly said: "It was an American statesman [William Bourke Cockran] who inspired me when I was 19 [and presumably after!] & taught me how to use every note of the human voice like an organ." Further, Churchill was able "to quote long excerpts from Bourke Cockran's speeches of sixty years before," and said of the man "[h]e was my model—I learned from him how to hold thousands in thrall" (R. Churchill, Vol. 1 *Youth* 282-83). Churchill's relationship with Bourke Cockran—and Bourke Cockran's influence on Churchill's political thought—has recently been investigated by Michael McMenamin and Curt Zoller, and in passing by Martin Gilbert (McMenamin and Zoller 7-8; Gilbert, *Churchill* 17; for a summary of influences, see Toye 12-17). Though Bourke Cockran's speeches have not been studied in detail and only selected speeches have even been published, prominent features of the passage from Churchill are not difficult to find. Churchill would have seen in Bourke Cockran coordinate structures, coordinate structures with antitheses, anaphora, and even chiastic anaphora with variation, almost all of them in one of his major speeches about World War I, "The World War":

1. Coordinate structures: "To this **gross misrepresentation and utter misconception** of **American spirit and American purpose**, Boston today gives **final and**

conclusive answer, in this mighty demonstration, in the enthusiastic multitudes that have thronged its streets this afternoon, and in all the manifestations of welcome extended by the people of this Commonwealth to the Belgian Delegation, from the moment that it crossed the borders of this state." ("The World War" 334; see also "The Cost of War" 264)

2. Anaphora in a chiastic structure (note also the alliterating coordinate structure): "Moreover this mighty demonstration is conclusive proof that **when the President of the United States asked Congress** to declare war he was not imposing a policy of his own upon a reluctant country, but was obeying the command of a nation. **We have** not been **dragooned or driven** into this conflict. **We have** insisted on entering it, to make justice, which is divine, supreme over military force, which is brutish. **When President Wilson urged Congress** to declare war as a necessary step to make the world safe for Democracy, he raised this conflict far above any sordid enterprise of conquest, or vengeance, or advantage." ("The World War" 336)

3. Parallel anaphora with lexical chiasmus ("soil . . . Belgium . . . Belgium . . . soil"): "The **soil** of **Belgium** will forever be sacred in the eyes of freemen, for it has drunk the blood of heroes who died not merely for the safety of their country, but for the Justice of Heaven. **Belgium** suffering; **Belgium** ravaged; **Belgium** with **her** people plundered, **her** cities ruined, **her** noblest temples of commerce and of religion mere piles of blackened ruins; **Belgium** driven

almost completely from her own **soil** has uttered no complaint of the sacrifices which loyalty to justice has entailed upon **her.**" ("The World War" 345)

4. Concluding anaphora, again with variation, almost in perfect parallelism ("it"/"it is"); concluding tricolon with anadiplosis/epizeuxis; adjective and adverb/verb coordinate structures: "That answer ['God wills it,' that is, to save Christian civilization by fighting the war] is not shouted by the lips of thoughtless multitudes. **It** governs the heart throbs of the whole people. **It** finds expression deep down in the bowels of the earth when the miner drops his pick; in the field, when the laborer abandons his plow; in every workshop where the mechanic quits his bench; in every field of industry where men give up their daily gain to hasten to the recruiting offices for enrollment in the army of the Republic. **It is** the absorbing prepossession of men wherever they assemble for discussion or for worship. **It is** the burden of every address to which an audience will give ear. **It is** embodied in every prayer addressed to the Throne of God. **It** finds a place in the ritual of the Protestant. **It** animates the fervor of the Jewish Synogogue [sic]. **It** rises to Heaven with the incense that is burned before Catholic Altars. **It is** part of the blessing which the American woman bestows upon her son departing for the battlefield. **It** mingles with the prayer which the mother breathes by the cradle of her infant. **It** has held you, my friends, listening to these poor words of mine which could command your attention only by reason of the sublime subject which they discussed: **Democracy! Democracy**

made safe, and therefore triumphant! **Freedom! Freedom** to all nations, **great and small! Justice! Justice** to Belgium–to all the children of men. 'God wills it!' The American people are **unanimously resolved and immovably determined** to make that Will successful, triumphant, supreme throughout the world." ("The World War" 349-50)

Even from these brief examples of Bourke Cockran's rhetorical figures, we can see that Churchill could have had Bourke Cockran's speeches in mind when composing the "we shall" sequence. The major rhetorical devices are almost all there: the only features that do not have a major role in Bourke Cockran's speeches are the clustered three-word coordinate structures and the particular attention to diction that characterize Churchill's speech. Churchill's concluding passage has an entirely different effect as a result of these departures than any of the passages quoted above.

While the focus here is the "we shall" sequence of Churchill's speech, also worth noting is that Churchill's historical perspective may have been influenced by Bourke Cockran as well. The same speech quoted above, the full title of which is "The World War, the Greatest of the Crusades," goes into some detail about the history of the Germanic peoples, beginning with Armenius [Arminius] and the Battle of the Teutoberg Forest (a Germanic/Roman conflict), demonstrating knowledge of Tacitus, and concludes with a lengthy invocation of the Crusades, another "enterprise" as "valiant" as the First World War (346-49). In Churchill's speech, the focus is opportunity, and Churchill shifts the focus to England and Arthur by including "The Knights of the Round Table" with the Crusaders. Churchill even quotes Tennyson's *Morte D'Arthur*, Sir Bedivere's

melancholy and reflective words to Arthur just before his funeral ship sets sail (ll. 230-31). That same sense of historical parallels leads Churchill to mention Napoleon's plans to invade England: "We are told that Herr Hitler has a plan for invading the British Isles. This has often been thought of before. When Napoleon lay at Boulogne for a year with his flat-bottomed boats and his Grand Army, he was told by someone: 'There are bitter weeds in England'" (winstonchurchill.org). Incidentally, the First World War might even have provided the basic model for the "we shall fight" anaphora: about the same time as Bourke Cockran was addressing the American people, Churchill was in France in his role as the British Minister of Munitions (1917-1919), where he visited Amiens with Georges Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister. Clemenceau reportedly told Churchill: "I will fight in front of Paris; I will fight in Paris; I will fight behind Paris" (Persico 222).[10]

Though Churchill wrote prolifically, he did not address the subject of rhetoric very often. *Savrola*, an early work of fiction, includes a description of the main character's compositional process, but the passage is not enormously helpful: "His ideas began to take the form of words, to group themselves into sentences; he murmured to himself; the rhythm of his own language swayed him; instinctively he alliterated . . . That was a point; could not tautology accentuate it? . . . The sound would please their ears, the sense improve and stimulate their minds" (74).[11] Churchill's only clear statement on the topic comes in "The Scaffolding of Rhetoric," which was originally unpublished and which he wrote it in 1897 (just before, it seems, he began to write *Savrola*) at the age of twenty-two. There, Churchill noted that some "elements" were "inherent in all rhetoric," but suggested "that there are certain features common to all the finest speeches in the English language" (817). Churchill felt there

was a particularly English tradition of oratory, achieved via what he called "six principal elements," though in fact he lists only five, discussing correctness of diction; rhythm; accumulation of argument; analogy; and a "tendency to wild extravagance of language" (R. Churchill, Vol. 1 *Companion* 816-21):[12]

1. Correctness of diction is of primary importance. As Churchill says, "there is no more important element in the technique of rhetoric than the continual employment of the best possible word" (818). Churchill's only example is the use of the word *dour* to describe the Scottish people: "*Dour* is a rare and uncommon word: but what else could it convey to the Anglo-Saxon mind than the character of the people of a cold, grey land, severe, just, thrifty and religious?" (818). In fact, our sense of the diction of the passage is confirmed:

The unreflecting often imagine that the effects of oratory are produced by the use of longer words . . . the shorter words of a language are usually the more ancient. Their meaning is more ingrained in the national character and they appeal with greater force to simple understandings than words recently introduced from the Latin and the Greek. (818-19)

2. Rhythm: Sentences should be "long, rolling, and sonorous" and should achieve a "balance" which "produces a cadence which resembles blank verse rather than prose" (819).

3. To achieve an "accumulation of argument," to move toward "the climax of oratory," is to give to the audience a "rapid succession of waves of sound and vivid pictures," to muster a "series of facts" "all pointing in a common

direction," which allows the listeners to "anticipate the conclusion," to recognize what is to come (819).

4. Churchill says of analogy that, if "apt," it has the power to connect the known to the unknown, the concrete to the abstract, and the finite to the infinite. Analogies, "whether they translate an established truth into simple language or whether they adventurously aspire to reveal the unknown," are among the "most formidable" tools of the rhetorician (819-20). Churchill gives several examples (this seems to have been his fifth point), including one from Lord Salisbury: "They (Frontier wars) are but the surf that marks the edge and advance of the wave of civilisation" (820).

5. Finally, what Churchill means by a "wild extravagance of language" seems to be a statement of the heightened emotion of the audience and speaker, an extreme statement of the principle, in other words. The effect of that wild extravagance is to give outlet to the energies and passions of the speaker and the audience, to avoid inciting them to immediate and reckless or violent action. Churchill calls it "the safety valve," having given two examples (820-21).

The first three elements are clearly in evidence in the "we shall" passage. We have explored Churchill's diction, his preference for shorter and more ancient words, except as a feature of contrast or variation (note how "foreign" the "odious apparatus of Nazi rule" sounds), the balance he favours, though not precisely blank verse and not in long sentences, and the accumulation of argument as a key feature as the speech moves toward its conclusion. The passage does not exhibit analogy, his fourth (and fifth) elements, nor any wild extravagance, as metaphor would interfere with the immediacy

of the passage and Churchill's "safety valve" is not required in an address to parliament. Churchill's essay focuses on style, even if one might argue that inuentio or dispositio are partially addressed,[13] offering a hint of Churchill's early thinking about effective rhetoric, and corresponds to a surprising extent, at least in general terms, with "We shall fight on the beaches."

Although Churchill's education, influences, and statements about rhetoric must be understood in order to assess the genesis of the "we shall" sequence, the coordinate structures and the rhythm, including alliteration, of the passage remain relatively unaddressed. Though Churchill suggests in the essay that Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* is "a remarkable instance of correctness of diction and rhythm" (819), Johnson's 1759 novel hardly models the structures we see in Churchill. Instead, I would suggest that the closest analogue to our passage, certainly the only model I can think of for the coordinate structures, lies in English much earlier than Johnson, particularly in the writings of the two most significant vernacular prose writers of the Old English period, Ælfric of Eynsham and Wulfstan of York, and it is here that Churchill's education and study may prove important. The "prose" of both Ælfric and Wulfstan has been shown to approach verse, or to share qualities with Old English verse, though, as stylists, they are much different. In both cases, though, scholars and editors have debated strenuously how to present their writings, either continuously, as prose, or broken into verse lines. (For a summary of the scholarship, see Fox 30n23.) The opening of Ælfric's translation of Alcuin's commentary on Genesis is an example of Old English "rhythmical prose," here laid out as alliterating verse:

Sum geþungen lareow wæs on Engla lande

Albinus gehaten and hæfde micele geþincða.

Se lærde manega þæs Engliscan mennisces

on boclicum cræfte, swa swa he wel cuþe,

and ferde siþþan ofer sæ to þam snoteran kyninge,

Karolus gehaten, se hæfde micelne cræft

for Gode and for worulde, and he wislice leofode.

To þam com Albinus, se æðela lareow,

and on his anwealde ælþeodig wunode

on Sancte Martines mynstre, and þær manega gelærde

mid þam heofonlican wisdome þe him se hælend forgeaf. (1–11)

[A certain distinguished teacher in the land of the English was called Albinus, and he had great merit. He instructed many of the English folk in book knowledge, such as he well understood, and then travelled over the sea to that wise king, called Karolus, who had great skill both for the things of God and of the world and lived wisely. Albinus, the noble teacher, came to him and lived as a foreigner in his kingdom, in the minster of St Martin, and taught many there with the heavenly wisdom which the Lord himself had granted him.]

The passage could be argued to achieve a balance, a cadence almost like verse—and, indeed, such has been argued—and there is a clear use of alliteration in every line; ornamental additional alliteration in the central line (chiastic /k/, /h/, /h/, /k/); a repetition in lines 2 and 6 that emphasizes the complementary talents of Alcuin and Charlemagne and that links Alcuin and Charlemagne to God in line 11 (the first pair of lines alliterate "gehaten"/"hæfde," and the final alliterate "heofonlican"/"Hælend"); and an apparent attempt further

to organize the passage around the chiastic repetition of "lærde manega" and "manega gelærde" (Fox 31–32). However, though the passage's rhythm, alliteration, and overall structure might be similar to Churchill's "we shall" sequence, Ælfric's introduction does not have many coordinate structures, containing only "for Gode and for worulde," an example which hardly has the weight of Churchill's heavy use.

Wulfstan's writings, and primarily his sermons, have in recent years also been subject to extensive stylistic analysis for their resemblance to poetry. In fact, Andy Orchard has shown that the sermons are generally organized into short two-stress "lines" or "phrases" that resemble the half-lines of Old English verse. Many of the sermons also contain "pointing," or scribal marks indicating the rhythms of the stressed syllables. Some critics have also focused on features resembling our coordinate structures, but, in most cases, more specifically than I think is perhaps warranted. For example, Don Chapman has identified Wulfstan's echoic compounds, in which "a constituent of one compound is echoed in a nearby simplex or compound, either as a full lexical repetition like 'wedlogan ne wordlogan' . . . or as a chiming of similar sounds, as in 'þeofas and ðeodscaðan'" (1). Others have looked at what they call "doublets" or "word pairs," and offered a brief definition in term of translation theory, suggesting that paired terms in place of one Latin word could advance adequacy (an adequate single word not existing in the target language) or acceptability (using words the audience knows and will accept) (Discenza 58; Koskenniemi 12; Williams and Nadel 109). However, this is not what happens in Wulfstan's sermons, in which alliterative doublets appear on average ten times per sermon (Orchard, "Crying Wolf" 248), and in which Wulfstan shows a marked preference for a few particular examples as he reuses the

same kinds of structures (such as "wide and side" ["widely and extensively"] or "wordes and weorces" ["of word and of deed"]).

Defining this device is difficult. The closest classical term is probably polysyndeton (the use of many conjunctions), though the figure can also be a form of zeugma (when one part of speech governs two or more other parts of a sentence). When the figure is embellished by repeating inflectional endings or derivational prefixes (for example), it could also involve similiter cadens (or homoeptoton, two or more words with the same endings) and simple alliteration (or paromoeon). Hendiadys (expressing one thing by means of two) is also a possibility. Scholars of Old English have, for straightforward coordinate noun and verb examples such as "fæhðe ond fyrene" ("feud and crime") and "ongitan and oncnawan" ("[to] perceive and [to] recognize"), offered the simple term "doublet," which perhaps works better than the terms of classical rhetoric.

The best-known user of the "doublet" in Anglo-Saxon England was Wulfstan, and Wulfstan's most studied work is the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, probably first delivered at York on or about February 16, 1014 (and extant in a few versions), when the king, Æthelræd, had fled to Normandy and Danish raids were constant. A typical passage heavy with doublets is as follows:

Ne dohte hit nu

lange inne ne ute,

ac wæs here and hunger,

bryne and blodgyte,

on gewelhwylcan ende

oft and gelome.

And us stalu and cwalu,

stric and steorfa,

orfcwealm and uncoþu,

hol and hete […] (Bethurum 269, ll. 55–8)

[Nothing has prospered now for a long time, here or abroad, but war and hunger, burning and bloodshed, was nearly everyplace often and frequently. And theft and killing, pestilence and death, murrain and disease, malice and hate (have damaged us very severely).]

Examples from the sermon could be multiplied, but this excerpt gives a sense of the various ways in which Wulfstan uses doublets: many pairs alliterate, rhyme, or have various phones in common, and some of the doublets become features of Wulfstan's essential technique of repetition (Orchard 248).

When Wulfstan composed his sermon, he himself took a long view of Anglo-Saxon history, making reference to Gildas, the sixth-century author of *De excidio Britanniae*, an account of the fall of Celtic Britain to Germanic invaders. Wulfstan said

An þeodwita wæs on Brytta tidum Gildas hatte. Se awrat be heora misdædum hu hy mid heora synnum swa oferlice swyþe God gegræmedan þæt he let æt nyhstan Engla here heora eard gewinnan and Brytta dugeþe fordon mid ealle. And þæt wæs geworden þæs þe he sæde, **þurh ricra reaflac and þurh gitsunge wohgestreona, ðurh leode unlaga and þurh wohdomas, ðurh biscopa asolcennesse and þurh lyðre yrhðe Godes bydela** þe soþes geswugedan ealles to gelome and clumedan mid ceaflum þær hy scoldan clypian. (Bethurum 274, ll. 176–84)

[A wise man in the time of the Britons was called Gildas. He wrote about their misdeeds, how they by their sins angered God so much that he at last let the army of the English conquer their land and destroy the power of the Britons completely. And that happened, as he said, through the robbery of the rich and through the coveting of ill-gotten gains, through the lawlessness of the people and through unjust judgements, through the laziness of bishops and through the wicked cowardice of God's messengers, who all too frequently kept silent about the truth and mumbled with their jaws when they should have cried out.]

Wulfstan's report of Gildas' words includes isocolon (beginning with the parallel "Engla here" and "Brytta dugeþe"), three coordinate structures (here also with anaphora with "þurh"), and a fair bit of alliteration (as well as other more sophisticated aural devices, such as the "yðr" of "lyðre" repeated in parallel with chiasmus in the "yr_ð" of "yrhðe"), not to mention vocabulary that echoes other parts of the sermon. The passage about Gildas, however, is not completely original to Wulfstan. This part of the sermon has long been recognized to come directly from Alcuin, who, devastated to hear of the destruction of Lindisfarne, wrote home to Archbishop Æthelheard, probably in June of 793. In fact, Wulfstan had a copy of the letter in a collection of documents he deemed significant, and he had underlined the following Latin words:

Legitur uero in libro Gildi Brettonum sapientissimi, quod idem ipsi Brettones propter **rapinas et auaritiam** principum, propter **iniquitatem et iniustitiam** iudicum, propter **desidiam et pigritiam** praedicationis episcoporum, propter **luxoriam et malos mores** populi patriam perdiderunt. (Alcuin, Epist. 17)

[One reads in the book of Gildas, wisest of the Britons, that in fact the Britons themselves, through the pillaging and greed of the leaders, through the iniquity and injustice of the judges, through the laziness and

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slackness of the bishops, through the lasciviousness and wicked ways of
the people, lost their homeland.]

Surprisingly, I think, we see in Alcuin's Latin both a heavy use of
doublets (here objects of a single preposition, "propter," unlike in
Wulfstan's *Sermo*), an unmistakeable dose of alliteration, and some
assonance and consonance, particularly between the coordinate
nouns. Wulfstan, at least in this passage, would seem to have
adopted and adapted Alcuin's figures,[14] though the "pure"
doublets of the first passage are uniquely Wulfstan's.[15]

In Anglo-Saxon England, then, the rhetorical tradition in times of
national distress looked back to Gildas' account of the invasion of
the island by Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in the late fifth century.
There, as Bede relates, the Celts were pushed back and west to the
hills: as Churchill promises to fight in retreating stages from France
to the hills of England, Bede notes how the invaders forced their
way from east to west, until those who remained "eked out a
wretched and fearful existence among the mountains, forests, and
crags" (64), making the "we shall" sequence of the speech a striking
evocation of Christian Celtic defiance in the face of Germanic
invasion. The Celts rallied under Ambrosius Aurelianus, at least for a
time, and Ambrosius Aurelianus is the historical foundation of the
legend of King Arthur, whose stand against barbarian invaders
Churchill relates in terms that demonstrate clearly his familiarity
with the historical tradition and the parallels he sees with World
War II:[16]

 There [in Gildas' and Nennius' histories and the naming of Arthur]
 looms large, uncertain, dim but glittering, the legend of King Arthur
 and the Knights of the Round Table. Somewhere in the Island a great
 captain gathered the forces of Roman Britain and fought the barbarian

invaders to the death . . . And wherever men are fighting against barbarism, tyranny, and massacre, for freedom, law, and honour, let them remember that the fame of their deeds, even though they themselves be exterminated, may perhaps be celebrated as long as the world rolls round. Let us then declare that King Arthur and his noble knights, guarding the Sacred Flame of Christianity and the theme of a world order, sustained by valour, physical strength, and good horses and armour, slaughtered innumerable hosts of foul barbarians and set decent folk an example for all time. (Churchill, *A History* 45–48)

When the first wave of Viking incursions threatened England and the monastery at Lindisfarne was sacked in 793, Alcuin turned to the words (and reasoning) of Gildas when he wrote home. As we saw, Alcuin used coordinate structures and alliteration even in his Latin letter. Wulfstan, seeing the English nation oppressed by a second wave of Viking incursions, turned to Alcuin, quoting Gildas, and peppered his sermon not only with coordinate structures, but with more elaborate alliteration and parallel and chiastic structures. Inna Koskenniemi and E.S. Olszewska have shown that these coordinate structures appear throughout Old English, and persist into the early Middle English period in works such as the *Peterborough Chronicle*, the *Ancrene Riwle*, and the *Ancrene Wisse*. Olszewska has found the same structures in the *Ormulum* and has shown how there are many Old Norse parallels, suggesting a particular Germanic affinity for the device. In its origin, it is not a technique that arrives with French (or even with Latin), a juxtaposition of a native word and a "new" or "foreign" synonym, and as Otto Jespersen has pointed out, some of these doublets, comprised of two native words, become idiomatic expressions.[17]

Much more could be said about Anglo-Saxon rhetorical traditions and their roots in classical rhetoric. That Churchill's "We shall fight

on the beaches" speech looks back to Old English, and specifically to Wulfstan, cannot be proven. By the time the speech was composed, however, Churchill had submitted what he thought was the final draft of *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples* on December 16, 1939 (Clarke 232-39), and he was clearly thinking about the tenth- and eleventh-century invasions of England as recently as 1938, when he had decided to spend part of his holiday studying the reign of King Æthelræd the Unready (Clarke 252; Churchill, *History* 107-108).[18] In the *History* (which was not published until 1956, ten years after the end of the war), Churchill relates an idiosyncratic, but not unreliable, history of the events that led to a Danish king of England in 1016. He does not mention Wulfstan, but if we go back to the first Viking age and the raid of 793, we find Churchill quoting one of Alcuin's letters home, a letter to the Northumbrian king, Æthelred, written around the same time as Alcuin's letter to Æthelheard, Archbishop of Canterbury (Churchill, *History* 75; Alcuin, Epist. 16). Though the original Latin does not contain many doublets (only "miserie et calamitatis . . . exordium"), Alcuin uses anaphora twice, polyptoton, parallelism, alliteration, and other effects of sound.

More interestingly, Churchill's quote is precisely the same—both in its words and its ellipses—as that given by a well-known Anglo-Saxonist, R.W. Chambers. Chambers' *England Before the Norman Conquest* came out in 1926, and thus was certainly a work that Churchill could have seen, though Churchill clearly acknowledges only his debt to R.H. Hodgkin's *A History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1935), a work which contains part of this passage, but not as translated by Chambers. Chambers later translates most of Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (276-80), meaning that Churchill, if he used

this book, might well have had knowledge of the whole sermon. Chambers, however, also wrote a chapter called "The Life of Saxon England" for a popular encyclopedia of the period. The precise evolution of the encyclopedia is difficult to unravel, but it appears that *Harmsworth's Universal Encyclopedia* (1920-1922) was re-edited by Sir John Alexander Hammerton as *[Harmsworth's] Universal History of World* (beginning in 1927), at which time the chapter by Chambers was added. The encyclopedia was often reprinted, sometimes under different titles (such as the *Illustrated Encyclopedia of World History*). In any case, the chapter (which was not in every edition) originally included the quote from Alcuin's Epist. 16 (with the same ellipses) and two translated passages of Wulfstan's sermon. As Churchill prepared his address after the evaluation at Dunkirk, he certainly knew Alcuin's letters and Wulfstan's sermon, and he had detailed knowledge of historical threats to England, the prior invasions of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, and the two Viking ages of the Anglo-Saxon period.

In 1932, R.W. Chambers suggested that the "continuity of English prose [I would not, however, limit this statement generically] is to be found in the sermon and in every kind of devotional treatise . . . there is a series of links, sometimes working very thin, but never broken" (*On the Continuity* xc). The sophistication of Churchill's speech is clear, especially in its most memorable sequence, the conclusion. Deciding precisely how Churchill might have come to compose the conclusion as he did is impossible, but understanding the rhetorical features of the passage, considering Churchill's thoughts on rhetoric and possible influences, and looking at the tradition in which he was writing, both linguistically and historically, gives us an idea of the range of possibilities. His early

thoughts on rhetoric and the influence of William Bourke Cockran are important, but the passage is significantly different from Churchill's known models, especially in its diction and use of doublets. Given that Churchill knew both the history (the previous invasions of England) and the rhetoric surrounding that history (perhaps even in Old English and Latin), I believe he modelled his speech at least partly after Anglo-Saxon examples, recognizing his island nation to be under the same kind of threat it had faced several times. Churchill, with an extraordinary sense of native versus borrowed vocabulary and consciously echoing the verse-like structures, doublets, alliteration, and rhythms of Old English writers such as Ælfric and Wulfstan, was, in the composition of "We shall fight on the beaches," deliberately claiming his place in a long national tradition. Andy Orchard links Wulfstan, the earlier Latin poet (and perhaps Old English poet) Aldhelm, and the *Beowulf*-poet as "literate Anglo-Saxons who chose to compose in the traditional oral style of vernacular verse" (259). To call Churchill's a "retrospective style," as Orchard does for those Anglo-Saxons, is certainly apt.

NOTES

[1] I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this article. Their extensive and detailed commentary much improved this final version.
[2] The difficulty of the multiple audiences of the speech is perhaps best demonstrated by the struck-through text in the final passage: "Even though the United States continues to watch with a strange detachment the growth and advance of dangers which menace them ever more darkly" (Churchill Archive CHAR 09/140A/25).
[3] "Extracts from it [the speech] were broadcast on the BBC by a presenter. Churchill recorded it after the war . . . it is impossible to

know if that is exactly how he delivered the speech in the House of Commons" (Maguire 262).

[4] In the section quoted below, the typescript and text of churchill.org have five differences in word choice or phrasing.

[5] Adeline Bartlett defines an envelope pattern as "any logically unified group of verses bound together by the repetition at the end of (1) words or (2) ideas or (3) words and ideas which are employed at the beginning" (9). Bartlett also discusses a special category of parallel pattern that resembles the "we shall" sequence and that she calls the "incremental pattern," when the parallelism demonstrates "cumulative force" (30, 49).

[6] Weidhorn comments that "[t]he secret of [Churchill's] great wartime orations, as A.P. Herbert suggests, lies partly in the deliberate, recurring use of simple, vivid words in lieu of the polysyllabic, Latinate abstractions beloved of conventional politicians and administrators" (31–32).

[7] The etymology of the words discussed in this paragraph is informed by the relevant entries in Watkins' dictionary of Indo-European roots.

[8] This part is not reproduced here or in Table 1. The concluding section of the speech begins: "I have, myself, full **confidence** that if all do their duty, if nothing is neglected, and if the best arrangements are made, as they are being made, we shall prove ourselves once again able to defend our Island home, to ride out the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny, if necessary for years, if necessary alone." This leads to "utmost of their **strength**," meaning that the repetition is also chiastic.

[9] The whole of this speech in the typescript version (which may be viewed at the Churchill Archive site) is laid out in syntactic and thought units (CHAR 09/140A 9-23), like free verse (the Churchill

Archive calls it "psalm style"), until the final two sections of the speech (from "Turning once again, and this time more generally, to the question of invasion") which appear as continuous prose (CHAR 09/140A 24-26).

[10] See also Toye 49-52 on the possible influence of William Philip Simms and Lord Rosebery's promises about the Boer War on the "we shall" sequence.

[11] For a discussion of *Savrola* and Churchill's oratory, see Reid 156-60.

[12] On *Savrola* and "The Scaffolding of Rhetoric," see also Weidhorn 18-21.

[13] The "accumulation of argument" (accumulatio or amplificatio) could perhaps be classed as inuentio or dispositio; by Geoffrey of Vinsauf (c. 1200), for example, amplificatio and abbreuiatio are a separate new category between dispositio and elocutio. The heightened emotion in the peroratio could be argued to be a feature of dispositio, though the rhetorical device in question seems more to be pathopoeia (and thus elocutio).

[14] It could be argued, of course, that Alcuin's Latin is heavily influenced by his knowledge of Old English; Wulfstan's Latin, in turn, contains similar features.

[15] See also Orchard, "Wulfstan," 324-26 for an analysis of the rhetorical features of the two passages.

[16] As Lori Maguire says, "Churchill consistently presents the Allies as defending . . . 'Christian civilisation' against the Nazi barbarians" (259).

[17] "Kith and kin," for example. See Jespersen 52; Koskenniemi; and Olszewska. For a useful semantic classification of different kinds of word pairs (for example, pairs based on opposition, complementary pairs, and tautological formulas), see Gurevič 33-41.

[18] The phrase "English-speaking peoples" is not original to Churchill, though he made it famous during the war, and it is not without its problems (Machan 269–305).

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