On the Issue of Performativity of Hymns

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Abstract

The article indicates that the study of the semantic-communicative component of hymns makes it possible to identify performative frameworks - "pillows", on which the foundation of speech activity rests. Thus, the obligatory semantic-communicative component of the hymns is informing the deity about his/her qualities, in other words, it is praising. The article reviewed three hymns written in Old English ("The Kentish Hymn", "The Cædmon's Hymn") and Early Middle English ("The Godric's Hymn"). The author focuses on paganism in Old English hymns. Thus, the work emphasizes that at the dawn of Christianity, for a smooth transition from paganism to Christianity, the image of Jesus Christ was presented as the image of a leader (Cyning - Leader), while believers were represented as His warriors. The cross as the main Christian symbol often appears made of wood and is identified with the cosmic world tree growing right into heaven.

Calming down in prayer a person finds more and more followers even now, in the 21st century, and the glorification of the names of Saints, in particular Jesus Christ, is reflected in many liturgical practices. One of the most important elements in the prayer of a person with a higher being is the consistent observance of fasting, and sometimes even a complete rejection of food and drink. Edward Burnett Tylor, the father of the evolutionary theory of cultural development, in his work "Primitive Culture" describes the meaning of a religious rite, the consequence of which is painful exaltation. He points out that the connection between fasting and communication with spirits is considered so close by the Zulus that they have a saying: "A person, who is constantly full, cannot see secret things." They will never believe in a fat prophet. Belief in these expected or achieved results of fasting is preserved among comparatively cultural peoples. Therefore, it is not surprising that in a Hindu tale, King Vasavadatta with his queen after solemn repentance and a three-day fast saw Shiva in a dream, graciously talking with them. It is not surprising that Hindu yogis still bring themselves to fasting to a state in which they are supposedly able to see the gods with bodily eyes. Among the Greeks, the oracle priests recognized fasting as a means of evoking prophetic dreams and knowledge. The Delphic Pythia itself fasted for inspiration. Galen observes that fasting dreams are most clear. Centuries later, this custom passed into Christianity. So, the archangel Michael appears with a sword in his right hand and with scales in his left to a certain priest in Spont, who had been posturing and praying for a whole year. The priest asked him, if he would like to have a temple built in his honor (Taylor, 2010). It is the observance of these spiritual and ascetic practices that contribute to the indispensable (bilateral) communication of believers with the supreme forces.

In addition to prayer calls, divine songs praising and glorifying the Lord and saints also occupy an important place in the life of a believer, especially on days of abstinence from food and drink. Such songs are called hymns. What are divine hymns?

M.Yu. Lotman sees the hymn as a communicative act of emphatic nature, and praising the higher powers in it is (semi) performative verbs, since praise is primarily the utterance of divine qualities aloud. The researcher emphasizes the mnemonic component of such texts in time,

thanks to the enumeration of divine deeds. So, for example, hymns contain an extended list of qualities of the Lord God, but why, if the all-knowing God knows this already? Consequently, the obligatory semantic-communicative component of the hymn is to inform the deity of his own qualities, in other words, his praise, while prayer is the request of something from higher powers, and the psalms are to inform God about what human beings are. Thus, the illocutionary goal of the hymn is hidden declarative and performative (Lotman, 2013).

S.G. Proskurin analyzes the semiotic basis for the study of spiritual culture. So, he notices that "languages and culture appear in the form of a networked formation containing a performative core as a value that can generate meta descriptions, which, in turn, can be considered by subjects as second-order values. Performatives are at the center of language and culture are explicit and transform into meta-operators of rituals. For instance, performative *I swear* ›, but the meta-operator is constative *He swears*. Ritual matrices of culture, as a rule, contain performative complexes, described at one time by John Austin. Such performative kernels are neither true nor false, i.e. they cannot be denied; they have constitutive power: biblical performative "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Proskurin, 2011, p.237). Émile Benveniste points out that the social order is supported by performative statements in a speech act, which is a consequence of self-reference, or self-reference, i.e. ability to relate, as with its referent, to the reality that it creates itself, due to the fact that it is pronounced under the conditions that make it action (Benveniste, 1974, p. 308). Returning to the illocutionary function of the utterance (the pragmatic component of the meaning of the saying), we note the following: the concept of illocution was proposed by J. Austin in the scientific work "How to Do Things with Words" [Austin, 1962], where it was shown that the speech act can be analyzed through phonetic (locative) act — utterance of the utterance, fatic (illocutionary) act — actualization of the intentional aspect of utterance, retic (perlocutionary) act - the utterance's impact on the addressee.

J. Austin is the founder of not only the concept of illocution, but also performative. In his understanding (Austin, 1966) the performative acts as a statement, acting as a cross of a word

and a deed (an act appears behind the statement), and looks like a statement, but not meaningless, i.e. it can be neither true nor false. These statements include active verbs of the indicative mood in the first person singular (*I call this ship Queen Elizabeth*), or verbs in the form of passive voice (in the return form) in the second or third person (*you are ... authorized*). A person uttering such a statement does not just say something, but does something. J. Austin gives an example of a wedding ceremony when the groom says "*yes*," thereby confirming that he really takes this woman to be his legal wife. However, performing performative utterances is not always appropriate; as there are situations in which certain conditions are not met that violate the transparent rules for the performance of the performative. Such situations in the theory of J. Austin are called unsuccessful (*infelicitous*). For example, continuing the situation with the legalization of marriage, J. Austin notes that the divorce procedure requires certain formalities, and the public statement "*I am divorcing you*" is not a sufficient act to terminate the marriage immediately. Therefore, in this case, the convention does not exist. Unsuccessful performative statements are also those that were uttered by a person against his/her will, i.e. being in the grip of any other circumstances by virtue of which the speaker is not fully responsible for what (s)he is doing.

Performatives are common in religious practices. As examples of divine songs praising and glorifying the Lord and saints, we consider three hymns recorded in Old English and Early Middle English (the original text is presented in: (Old English Shorter Poems, 2012). *The Kentish Hymn* is a periphery (recorded in the Kent dialect) of the ancient hymn *Gloria in excelsis deo*, which is based on the Gospel of Luke (2:14), which was performed on Saturday masses, as well as on major holidays. *The Cædmon's Hymn* is an ancient work from *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. *The Godric's Hymn* is an anthem dating back to the Early Middle English period, as well as the final rhyme of the lines.

The Kentish Hymn

Wuton wuldrian   weorada dryhten

halgan hlioðor-cwidum, hiofen-rices weard,

lufian liofwendum lifẹs agend,

and him simle sio sigefẹst wuldor

5 uppe mid ænglum, and on eorðan sibb gumena gehwilcum   goodes willan.

We ðe heriað halgum stefnum

and þe blætsiað, bile-wit fẹder,

and ðe þanciað,   þioda walden,

10 ðines weorðlican   wuldor-dreames

and ðinra miclan   mægena gerena,

ðe ðu, God dryhten, gastes mæhtum

hafest on gewealdum hiofen and eorðan,

an ece fẹder, ælmehtig God.

15   Ðu eart cyninga cyningc cwicera gehwilces,

ðu eart sigefest sunu and soð hẹlend

ofer ealle gescẹft   angla and manna.

Ðu, dryhten God, on dreamum wunast

on ðære upplican æðelan ceastre,

20 frea folca gehwæs, swa ðu æt fruman wære efen-eadig bearn agenum fæder.

Ðu eart heofenlic lioht and ðæt halige lamb, ðe ðu man-scilde middan-geardes

for þinre arfẹstnesse   ealle towurpe,

25   fiond geflæmdest, follc generedes,

blode gebohtest   bearn Israela,

ða ðu ahofe ðurh ðæt halige triow

ðinre ðrowunga ðriostre senna,

þæt ðu on hæah- setle   heafena rices

30 sitest sige-hræmig on ða swiðran hand ðinum God-fæder, gasta gemyndig.

Mildsa nu, meahtig, manna cynne,

and of leahtrum ales ðine ða liofan gescęft,

and us hale gedo, heleða sceppend,

35 niða nergend, for ðines naman are.

Ðu eart soðlice simle halig,

and ðu eart ana æce dryhten,

and ðu ana bist eallra dema

cwucra ge deadra, Crist nergende,

40 forðan ðu on ðrymme ricsast, and on ðrinesse and on annesse, ealles waldend,

hiofena heah-cyninc, haliges gastes

fegere gefelled in fæder wuldre.

The Kentish Hymn is listed in the X-XI centuries, MS Cotton Vespasian D.vi at the British Library. "The Complete Old English Poems" (Williamson, 2017) tells the following about this hymn: *The Kentish Hymn* is more likely a poem praising the Triune God, with a reference to *Te Deum*, *The Apostles' Creed*, and *Agnus Dei*, rather than the Old English version of the Latin hymn of worship. Probably, the author of the hymn was a monk / nun, as evidenced by the presentation of the divine idea in the text itself. The hymn, presumably, refers to the end of the 10th century, being written under the influence of the rules of St. Benedict.

This hymn is interesting from a linguistic point of view. Thus, the Trinity of God is described, as well as purely Christian concepts (*hiofen-rices wears* — Guardian of the Kingdom of Heaven; *lifęs agend* — Creator of life; *bile-wit fęder* — the immaculate Father; *þioda walden* — Lord of man; *ece fęder* — the eternal Father; *sigefest sunu* — victorious Son; *soð hęlend* — true Savior; *heofenlic lioht* — divine light; *halige lamb* — Lamb of God; *God-fæder* — God the Father; *Mildsa* - Almighty; *heleða sceppend* — Creator; *niða nergend* — Human Savior; *dema* — Judge; *Crist*

nergende ─ Christ the Savior), as well as tokens reflecting the pagan idea of faith (*weorada dryhten* ─ Lord of hosts; *God dryhten (dryhten God)* ─ Lord God; *ælmehtig God* ─ Lord Almighty; *cyninga cyningc* ─ King of kings; *dryhten* ─ Lord, *hiofena heah- cyninc* ─ Almighty of the Kingdom of Heaven). It is worth noting that at the dawn of Christianity, for the smooth transition from paganism to Christianity, the image of Jesus Christ was presented as the image of the leader (*Cyning* ─ Leader), while believers represented themselves as His warriors. Émile Benveniste notes the following: in Germanic languages this type of word formation is presented in several important derivatives: Gothic *Þiudans* (from * teuta-nos)" king, head of the community", *kindins* (from * genti-nos)" *head* "("gens") - they are parallel to lat. *tribūnus* from *tribus*. In the old English *dryhten* "Lord" (in the Christian texts "Lord") the form * drukti-nos "leader drukti" is reflected. Such a hierarchy was characteristic of ancient German society (Benviniste, 1995, p. 88–89). These examples indicate that, perhaps, to introduce and consolidate the Christian faith among the ancient Germans, Christ appeared to them as the leader of the tribe. Over time, on the island of Britain, the image of Christ came to the fore, while maintaining a pagan connotation.

The lexemes *middan-geardes* (middle world) and *halige triow* (holy tree) also act as a characteristic trace of pagan beliefs in this hymn. The center of the world (* midjan-gardaz ─ *Middle fenced place*), the center of the world of ancient Germans is marked by the world ash tree *Yggdrasill* in North German (Scandinavian) mythology, the pillar of *Irminsul* in Central German mythology, a high mountain (where *Asgardr* gods live) in Scandinavian mythology. S.G. Proskurin notes the German word **midjan-gardaz* with the meaning "middle world" (which is literally read according to him as "center", "middle of the world"), as it correlates more with the "horizontal" view of the world, where the middle part, inhabited by people (midgard), separate and frightening worlds, the abodes of gods and demons (utgard) are opposed (Stepanov, 2004, p. 93).

The cross, as the main Christian symbol, often appears made of wood and is identified with the cosmic world tree growing directly into heaven. Most liturgical texts compare the cross with a

pillar, mountain, or staircase. Thus, the center of the world is part of the Christian picture of the world. In the Middle Ages, the concept of a world tree was often referred to as an "inverted tree" (lat. *Arbor inversa*), growing from heaven to earth: "Its roots are in heaven, and its branches are on earth." This is a striking example of a semiotic evolutionary series (i.e., replacing one object with another, while the second object copies the functions and forms of the first object). It is worth noting that the image of the cross in early Christian literature was presented as follows: four branches of the cross were associated with four dimensions of world space (width, longitude, height, depth (Lat. *Latitudo, longitudo, altitudo, profondum*)). The cross itself was represented by the image of the crucified Christ, and its measurements were associated with the position of the head, hands and body of the Savior. Mostly stable associations formed between the span of the hands of Christ and the width (*latitudo*) of the cross (Proskurin, 2013, p. 51, 59).

Therefore, considering the semiotic aspect of communication, it can be assumed that the communicative task was based on the fact that new information was understood through its transmission in the framework of the old image, already known to native speakers. Communication was based on a sociocultural base thanks to interindividual psychology. Thus, replacing the central cosmic symbol of the world tree with a cross that retains the features of a pagan symbol is an example of accessible communication. The task of transmitting information over time is to transmit information on an important Christian element of culture - the cross as a symbol of Christianity. The pagan image of the world tree is completely unimportant from the point of view of the semiotic aspect of information transfer, but it is important from the point of view of communication in the generation of Germans who have just adopted Christianity.

John Searle, speaking about speech acts, notes that by performing an illocutionary act, the speaker intends to get a certain result, forcing the listener to recognize his intention to get this result, and then, if he uses the words in the literal sense, he wants this knowledge was realized due to the fact that the rules for the use of the expressions pronounced by him connect these expressions with obtaining this result (Searl, 1986). In this hymn, the prayer's illocutionary act consists in asking for the remission of sins, in salvation and forgiveness (see lines 33-35).

Performative verbs *glorify, thank, praise, and love* (see lines 2, 4, 7, 8), along with praise of the divine essence, only strengthen the requestor's intention.

Let's move on to the second hymn ─ *The Cædmon's Hymn.*

The Cædmon's Hymn

Nu scylun hergan hefaen-ricaes uard,

muted maecti end his mod-gidanc,

uerc uuldur-fadur, sue he uundra gihuaes,

eci dryctin, or astelidæ.

5 He aerist scop aelda barnum

heben til hrofe, haleg scepen;

tha middun-geard mon-cynnæs uard,

eci dryctin, æfter tiadæ,

firum foldu, frea allmectig.

The wonderful story of the English poet, who received his gift to compose verses according to the command of God, is narrated by the tradition set forth by *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (XXIV (XXII) (see: (Beda Venerable, 2001)). Legend has it that the illiterate Cadmon, serving as a shepherd in the abbess's monastery, he couldn't compose frivolous empty poems for fun at feasts, and when he was given a harp for entertaining drinkers, he got up and went home. One day he also left the feast in embarrassment and went to the crib to guard the crib, a stranger who asked to sing about the beginning of creation, and Cadmon praised the Lord with verses never heard before. In the morning, a shepherd excited by divine vision, went to his ruler to tell about his gift, after which the master took him to the abbess. Scientists gathered to listen to the retelling of the vision and a divine hymn revealed in a dream. It became clear to everyone that it was the Lord who bestowed heavenly mercy on him to compose verses. Then they read the passage from that Scripture, inviting him to expound what he heard in verse. The next morning, Cadmon presented a retelling, successfully cast in the form of marvelous poems. The abbess,

recognizing God's blessing in the literary gift of an illiterate shepherd, prompted him to abandon worldly life and take a monastic vow.

According to the legend of Cadmon, the divine hymn contains eight revolutions of the Lord's naming, traditional for the Old English period: *hefaen-ricaes uard* — Guardian of the Kingdom of Heaven, *metudæs* — Creator, *uuldur-fadur* — Father of Glory, *eci dryctin* — eternal Lord, *holy saint Creator, mon-cynnæs uard* — Guardian of men, *frea allmectig* — omnipotent Ruler. *The Cædmon's Hymn*, like the Kentish Hymn, introduces the token *middan-geardes*, the middle world, indicating a pagan view of people about space. S.G. Proskurin, discussing the image of the world in early traditions, notes the following: it is the sacred nature of the central point of the world that allows us to understand the metonymic transfer of this term to the designation of the world in general — and thus combine the two named concepts. The restored picture of the preliterate period thus testifies: the center of the ancient Germanic world coincides with the center of sacred objects inscribed into each other (center, fenced place, etc.), demonstrating the heterogeneity and non-isotropy of the archaic cosmos (cf. the typological scheme of the mythopoetic space of various cultures: a sacrifice on the altar in the center - the temple - its own settlement - its own country, etc.) (Proskurin, Tsentner, 2009, p. 46-47).

In this hymn, as you can see, a performative statement is presented - *Nu scylun hergan* (Now we must thank) as a call to action, which is the complex on which the whole narration of the hymn stands, the main semantic and communicative component of which is the praise of the Lord God. This performative statement is neither true nor false from the standpoint of rational logic. Consider the third anthem — *The Godric's Hymn*.

The Godric's Hymn

Sainte Marie uirgine,

moder Iesu Cristes Nazarene,

onfo, scild, help þin Godric,

onfang, bring hehlic wið þe in Godest ric.

5 Sainte Marie, Cristes bur,

maidens clenhand, moderes flur,

dilie mine sinne, rixe in min mod,

bring me to winne wið self God.

In "The Complete Old English Poems" (Williamson, 2017, p. 1108) about *The Godric's Hymn* the following is said: this work also has a second name - *Godric's Prayers*, it is included in the collection MS Royal 5 F. vii, with a musical note, stored in the British Library, in London. Saint Godric led a diverse life before finally deciding to become a hermit: he was a merchant, a pilgrim traveler, and a ship captain. In the collection *Old English shorter poems* (Old English Shorter Poems, 2012, p. xxi) *The Godric's Hymn* and *The Cædmon's Hymn* are compared. It is indicated that both hymns are written in the native language of the poets, therefore, it seems extremely difficult for the researcher to differentiate hymns into liturgical texts and into solitary prayer, which in themselves are formally and chronologically diametrically opposed to higher powers. The author of *The Godric's Hymn* is considered to be the holy hermit Godric of Finchale, a native of northern England who was born on the eve of the Norman conquest and lived in the Anglo-Norman period. Saint Godric of Finchale, who was never canonized, but was considered holy, died in 1170. Consequently, the text of the hymn is most correctly attributed to the Early Middle English period, rather than to the Old English one, especially since rhymed lines in the form of *aabb,* characteristic of Latin and Norman-French versification, indicate this. Yet Godric's similarity with Cadmon's story is striking: the earliest copies of this hymn are found in stories about his life, otherwise written in Latin, and these narratives describe the poem as a supernatural gift given to the saint in a vision.

It is noteworthy, that this hymn does not praise the Lord Jesus Christ, but the Mother of God, thereby being one of the earliest appeals to the Virgin Mary. Due to the fact that *The Godric's Hymn* is chronologically a later hymn (compared to *The Kentish Hymn* and *The Cædmon's Hymn*), it does not represent the pace with pagan connotations. Moreover, the anthem is dotted with appeals to the Madonna typical of the medieval Christian period: *Sainte Marie uirgine,*

moder Iesu Cristes Nazarene — St. Mary, the Immaculate, mother of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, *Sainte Marie, Cristes bur, maidens clenhand, moderes flur* — St. Mary, refuge Christ, virgin of integrity, the color of motherhood. And compared to *The Kentish Hymn*, the kingdom of God is referred to as *Godest ric*, not *hiofena heah-cyninc*. Unlike the Old English divine hymns, this Early English Anthem does not include pronounced performative expressions; however, the author's prayer appeal is clearly illocutionary in the form of directives and declarations.

Thus, divine hymns are built on voice performative utterances dictating the further development of the text. So, in the work of S.G. Proskurin and V.V. Feschenko "Voice and bodily deixis as manifestation of performativity in written texts" notes the following: cultures rest on peculiar performative "pillows" that form a layer of cultural practices or transfers free from rational assessment. Old Testament formulas rely on voice performatives, while New Testament formulas are based on the unspoken hidden Word (Proskurin, Feshchenko, 2019). Consequently, the study of the semantic-communicative component of hymns reveals performative frameworks - "pillows" on which the foundation of speech activity rests.

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