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THE ORIGIN OF THE HISTORICAL PRESENT IN ENGLISH

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The historical present in English has received little careful study. The statements made in the various historical grammars are general and, at times, extremely vague. The purpose of this investigation is to supplement these vague statements by studying a representative body of Old and Middle English texts and by collecting a sufficiently large number of facts from which it may be possible to draw safe conclusions regarding the origin of this use of the present.

My plan is to present first, briefly, the various opinions that have been expressed regarding the reason for the appearance of the historical present in English, so that the reader may have these theories in mind as he examines the facts; next, I shall present a considerable body of the available facts regarding the appearance and the early development of the historical present in English. Finally, I shall devote the second section of the paper to a full discussion of the theories which have been advanced to explain the origin of the historical present in English and also in the other Germanic languages, especially in O. H. G. and M. H. G., where the subject has been studied in much greater detail than in English.

I

A. THE THEORIES FOR GERMAN

Grimm,[1] IV, 140 ff. According to Grimm, the historical present with a single exception,[2] does not occur in M. H. G. poetry. Its later extensive use is due to the influence of classical and other foreign languages.

Erdmann § 140. The historical present was not used in the older Germanic speech. Since the present was commonly used to express future time, the use of the same form to express past time (*i. e.*, as a historical present) would have caused confusion.

[1] Full titles are given in the bibliography.
[2] Otfrid, III, 26.

Wunderlich, I, 158.   Wunderlich classifies those presents which most closely resemble the historical present.   He disputes Grimm's statement that the historical present is foreign to early German. He believes that the historical present arose from those uses of the present which most closely resembled the historical present.

Behaghel, 199 ff.   Behaghel disputes the statement that the historical present could have arisen only after a special form for the future had developed, and had left the present form of the verb free to take on a past meaning.   He supports his contention by pointing out that in German the present is still used for the future, and for the historical present, and that those Slavic languages which have no characteristic future form use the historical present.   He furthermore rejects the theory of foreign influence.   Behaghel advances an entirely new and original theory.   He thinks that the historical present arose only after the Germanic distinction between perfective and imperfective verbs began to weaken.   To avoid repetition I refer the reader to Section II, where Behaghel's theory is discussed in detail.

Wilmanns, III, 96, accepts Behaghel's theory.

B. THE THEORIES FOR ENGLISH

Maetzner, II, 68 ff., says that the historical present is completely foreign to Anglo-Saxon poetry, "which lacks the warmth which gives scope for the subjective view."   He thinks that the historical present developed "out of popular poetry and not without the influence of Old French."

Sweet[3] believes that the use of the present for the future forbade the use of the historical present.

Brinkmann, II, 682-3, is of the same opinion as Sweet, but he holds that the historical present in Middle English is due to French influence.

Müller, p. 243, contents himself with the vague statement: "Das historisches praesens, welches für das präteritum steht, ist dem Angelsächsischen ziemlich (?) fremd."

Jespersen, *Tid og Tempus*, 385 ff., disputes the theory of French influence.   He believes that the historical present existed in Old English, but only in the colloquial speech: it was not permissible in dignified, formal, standard literature.   The absence of the historical

[3] Philological Society *Proceedings*, 1885-7, p. xlv.

present in Old English is therefore explained by the absence of popular Old English remains. He further maintains that the historical present in Middle English is to be found most frequently in the popular literature.

The summary given above shows that six[4] distinct theories have been advanced to account for the origin of the historical present:

1. The historical present did not occur in Old English because the Old English poets lacked the vivid imagination necessary to the use of this tense. (Maetzner).

2. The historical present developed naturally and logically from presents closely related to it (Wunderlich).

3. The historical present is a borrowing from Old French (Grimm, Maetzner, Brinkmann, Einenkel).

4. The historical present is colloquial in origin (Maetzner and Jespersen).

5. The origin of the historical present is bound up with the origin of the periphrastic future. Germanic had no characteristic future form. The present, therefore, had to serve a triple function: it might express general truths, present actions, and future actions. The use of this form to indicate past events would have caused ambiguity and confusion, for it would have crowded too many meanings upon one form (Grimm).

6. The origin of the historical present is bound up with *Aktionsart* in Germanic (Behaghel, Wilmanns).

C. The Historical Present in Old English

A reading of a large number[5] of Old English documents has convinced me that the historical present does not occur in Old English. There are a number of uses of the present tense, however, which might be confused with the historical present. It will be well to point out these classes of presents in advance. I shall quote from Old English wherever it is possible.

1. The present used in citations of authority refers to an act which is really past, but which is expressed as present since it is true for the present as well as for the past. For example,

David the salmwrihte
speketh in the sauter. *Hali Meidenhad*, (1-2).

[4] The first theory listed is really a theory to account for the absence of the historical present in Old English, but for convenience I class it with the theories of the origin of this use of the present.

[5] For a complete list of the works read see the bibliography.

2. The present of general truth (gnomic present) is really timeless. The present form of the verb lays no stress on the tense; it merely gives the verbal idea. This use of the present is common in all languages.[6] There are numerous examples in Old English. For example,

> Ic to soþe wat
> þæt bi∂ in eorle indryhten þeaw,
> þæt he his fer∂locan faeste *binde.*   *Wanderer*, (11-12.)

3. The present is often used in describing actions which began in past time, but which have not been completed at the time the speaker surveys the action. The action may continue into the present with no suggestion as to its completion, or the action may have begun in past time, extend through the present, and down into the future. The Latin present with *jam* or *jam dudum*, the French present with *depuis*, the German present with *jetzt, schon*, or *schon jetzt* illustrate this use. Modern English usually employs a present perfect progressive form: *e. g.,* "He has been living here for many years." Cf. the following:

> þat folc gan to spelien
> Irlondes speche
> And aver seo∂∂en þa la₃en
> *wunie∂* a þan londe.[7]   Layamon's *Brut*, (10070-73.)

> The Lady of Synadowne
> Longe *lyght* yn prisoun,[7]
> And that ys greet dolour.   *Lybeaus Disconus*, (1445-47.)

4. The present of reflection (Grimm's "reflectierendes Praesens") often occurs in subordinate clauses after verbs of saying, thinking, knowing, seeing, and the like. In such subordinate clauses the tense of the direct statement is used in the indirect; *i. e.,* the direct statement has influenced the indirect so strongly as to cause a violation of the normal sequence of tenses. Cf. modern colloquial English, "I told him to come as soon as he *can*," and, "He told me that he *is* tired."[8]

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[6] Dr. J. F. Royster has pointed out to me that there is a distinction between the expression of a general truth and that of a general untruth. Cf.: "He was convinced that it *is* true," (the statement was true at the time he was convinced and is still true), and, "Homer believed that the world *was* flat." (The statement of a fact that was true for past time, but not for the present.)

[7] *I. e.,* have been dwelling; has been lying.

[8] These sentences were taken from recent conversations. For examples in Old English see the quotations from *Beowulf*, pp. 7-9.

5. Occasionally in Old English, and very often in Middle English, one finds the present tense used among a series of preterites to give the opinion of the author. The narrative is halted for a time, and the author's comment on the story is inserted.

> Ore loverd helpe nouthe seint thomas for othur frend nath he non
> Among so manie tyraunz for to come that weren alle is fon.
> *Legendary*, (p. 128, ll. 749-750.)⁹

These presents should be carefully differentiated from the historical present; in all of them there is an element of real present time. The historical present, on the other hand, is a real preterit tense. In meaning it is the exact equivalent of a past tense. The action is looked upon as beginning and ending in the time sphere of the past.

I shall arrange the citations of doubtful presents from the Old English documents in approximate chronological order and shall discuss each quotation as it is given. I shall discuss only those passages which have been or might be wrongly regarded as historical presents.

> Cende cneowsibbe cenra manna
> heahfaedera sum, halige þeode,
> israela cyn, onriht godes,
>   Swa þaet orþancum ealde *reccað*
> þa þe maegburge maest gefrunon.   *Exodus*, (356-359.)

This present is a present of citation.

> þanon israhelum ece raedas
> on merehwearfe moyse saegde,
> heahthungen wer, halige spraece,
> deop aerende, daegweorc *nennað*,
> swa gyt wertheode on gewritum *findað*
> doma gehwilcne, þara þe him drihten bebead
> on þam siþfate soþum wordum.   *Exodus*, (1512-18.)

Blackburn's note to line 1515 reads: "A very mysterious expression. The following three verses refer to the legislation of Moses, and scholars have defined *daegweorc* here as the decalogue. Perhaps the poet intends to represent Moses as giving out his laws at this stage of their journey and elaborating and writing them down later, but the original represents Moses as uttering only a hymn of praise." I am unable to add anything to Blackburn's discussion of this passage. In any event it is impossible to see how this can be interpreted as a clear case of the historical present.

⁹ Cf. also 134: 960; 153: 1621.

> Ic adreah feala
> yrmþa over eorðan.   Wolde ic eow on þon
> þurh bliþne hiʒe bysne onstellan,
> swa on ellþeode ywed *wyrðeð*.   *Andreas*, (970-972.)

Christ is speaking words of encouragement to Andreas. The form *wyrðeð* may be regarded as a historical present or as a future. The context favors the use of the future. Krapp translates: "I wished therein with kindly intent to give you an example according as it shall be shown in this foreign land."

> Ne þearft swa þu swiþe synna gemyndig
> sar niwigan ond saece raeran
> morðres manfrea, þaet se mihtiga cyning[10]
> in neolnesse nyðer *bescufeð*
> synwyrcende in susla grund
> domes leasne, se-þe deadra feala
> worde awehte. *Elene*, (940-946.)

The use of a present form here is puzzling.   Shall we translate, "because the almighty king has cast thee down," "will cast thee down," or "casts thee down"?   Judas is speaking to the devil who has come to tempt him.   *þaet* may mean "so that," and *scufeð* may be regarded as a future.   Kennedy[11] translates "hath cast thee down." The verb appears in a subordinate clause.   In such clauses the logical sequence of tenses is often violated.   I regard this present as an example of such a violation of the sequence of tenses.

> God ana wat
> hu he þaet scyldi werud forscrifen haefde.
> *Cleopað* þonne se alda ut of helle,
> *wriceð* wordcwedas weregan reorde,
> eisegan stefne: "Hwaer com engla þrym,
> þa þe we on heofonum habban sceoldan?
> *Christ and Satan*, (32-54.)

Satan's speech runs to line 49.   The devils answer him as follows:

> þa him *andsweradan* atole gastes,
> swarte and synfulle, susle begrorene, etc. *Ibid.*, (50-51.)

Cleopað and *wriceð* are the only clear cases of the historical present I have found in Old English.   The preterit in line 50 shows clearly that the action of this passage is looked at as a past action.   For this reason it would be impossible to regard *cleopað* and *wriceð* as present

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[10] Holthausen accepts Zupitza's emendation of this line: morðres manfrea þaet þe se mihtiga cyning.

[11] *Poems of Cynewulf*, p. 116.

forms with future meaning. The occurrence of these two isolated examples of the historical present does not affect the statement that the historical present as a linguistic phenomenon does not occur in Old English. Whenever this statement is made, the reader should bear in mind that these two examples are always excepted.

In *Beowulf* there are several presents which might be wrongly construed as historical presents. The easiest of these to dispose of is *langað* in line 1879..

> Waes him se man to þon leof
> þaet he þone breostwylm forberan ne mehte,
> ac him on hreþre hyȝe-bendum faest
> aefter deorum men dyrne *langað*. *Beowulf*, (1876-79.)

Nader[12] regards this form as a historical present. But *langað* is a noun and is so regarded by Grein, Sedgefield, Heyne-Schücking, and Wyatt-Chambers.

> Donne saegdon þaet sae-liþende,
> þa þe ȝif-sceattas ȝeata fyredon
> þyder to þance, þaet he þritiȝes
> manna maeȝen-craeft on his mund-ȝripe
> heaþe-rof *haebbe*. *Beowulf*, (377-381.)

Sedgefield's note to line 381 reads: "*Haebbe* is subjunctive of reported speech." This present occurs in a subordinate clause after a verb of saying. It is a clear case of the present of reflection.

> ȝold-faȝ scinon
> web aefter waȝum, wundor-siona fela
> secȝa ȝehwylcum, þara þe on swylc *starað*. *Beowulf*, (994-996.)

The present is used here because the action of *starian* is not confined to the time expressed by *sciðnon*. It denotes general or customary action.

> samod aer-daeȝe
> eode eorla sum, aeþele cempa
> self mid ȝesiþum, þaer se snotera bad,
> hwaeþre him Al-walda aefre *wille*
> aefter wea-spelle wyrpe ȝefremman. *Beowulf*, (1311-15.)

The present is used here in a subordinate clause after a verb of knowing implied after *bad*. It is a clear case of the present of reflection.

> Het þa up beran aeþelinga ȝestreon,
> fraetwe ond faet-ȝold. Naes him feor þanon
> to ȝesecanne sinces bryttan,

[12] *Anglia* X, 547.

Hiȝelac Hrething, þaer aet ham *wunað*
selfa mid ȝesiþum sae-wealle neah.   *Beowulf*, (1921-24.)

Trautmann and Holthausen follow Thorpe and Grein in emending *wunað* to *wunade*. Sievers[13] prefers the retention of *wunað*.   He says: "Soll das praesens *wunað* beibehalten werden, so müssten wol die Worte von 'þaer' bis 'neah' als direkte rede gefasst werden, der durch v. 1921 (1920) angedeuteten aufforderung Beowulf's angehörig." But how are we to account for the intervening preterit *naes?*   Siever's explanation will not account for the insertion of *naes* between *het* and the clause of direct discourse depending upon it.   The verb occurs in a subordinate clause.   We may regard it as a violation of the sequence of tenses rather than as a doubtful historical present.   The use of a preterit here would have confined the statement strictly to the time sphere of the past.   The use of the present indicates that the statement describes a situation which existed in past time and which still exists.   The poet regarded the statement as still true at the time of writing.   For other examples of the violation of the strict sequence of tenses see the preceding example and *Beowulf* 1928, where a present perfect is used where modern readers would expect a pluperfect.   It is to be noted also that all of these passages are subordinate clauses.

In discussing the Ingeld episode, (*Bēowulf*, 2064 ff.) Professor W. W. Lawrence says:[14] "The Beowulf-poet here violates the propriety of strict logic in making his hero outline the well-known story of Ingeld and Freawaru, which must be supposed to be subsequent to Beowulf's visit to Hŕothgar."   In a foot-note to page 580 he quotes Olric's discussion of the Ingeld story: "I must utter a warning," says Olric, "against the very common but very meaningless assertion that what Beowulf relates in the Danish royal court at this point is not a narrative of what has already happened, but a prophecy of future events."   Professor Lawrence disputes Olric's statement.   He says: "Moreover, there is, I think, no other long passage in the poem in which the historical present is used in relating past events, as Olric assumes to be the case here."

The statement can be made stronger by further evidence.   There is no passage in this poem in which the historical present is used.

[13] *P. B. B.* IX, 141.
[14] *P. M. L. A.*, June, 1915.

As stated before, I have found only one clear example of the historical present in the Old English documents I have read. If Olric is right, he will have to explain this unique series of historical presents, the only occurrence in Old English. Again, *bioð* in line 2063 is clearly a future. A study of *Beowulf* will show that the form *bið* is used to express futurity and the form *is* to express real present time. This distinction is very clearly made throughout the poem.

> þa ic on morȝne ȝefraeȝn maeȝ oþerne
> billes ecȝum on bonan staelan,
> þaer Onȝenþeow Eofores *niosað*.   *Beowulf*, (2484-86.)

Grein emends to *niosade*. Chambers has pointed out similar presents in this poem. I regard this as a clear example of the present of reflection, where the direct statement has influenced the indirect. It is very significant that most of these doubtful presents occur in subordinate clauses. Dr. T. A. Knott has suggested to me that the present here may be due to attraction of the infinitive in the preceeding line. Either of these explanations will satisfactorily account for the present tense.

> Naes him aenig þearf
> þaet he to ȝifþum, oþþe to ȝar-Denum,
> oþþe in Swio-rice, secean *thurfe*.   *Beowulf*, (2493-96.)

Bugge[15] emends to *þorfte*. But this form is an optative in a subordinate clause. There is, therefore, no need for any emendation.

Sarrazin[16] makes the general statement that the historical present occurs in *Beowulf*. He gives no examples to support this statement, however, so until he has given further proof we may disregard his remarks.

> Ic *ondraede* me eac dom þone miclan
> for mandaedum minum on eorðan
> and þaet ece ic eac yrre *ondraede* me.   *Be Domes Daege*,
>   (15-17).

Höser[17] suggests that *ondraede* here may be regarded as an example of the historical present. He refers to Sievers' *Grammar* §393, where *ondraedde* is given as the weak form of the preterit of *draedan*, and asks if this form could not be a corruption of the preterit. He points out that this poem shows several changes of strong to weak inflection. Sweet[18] criticizes Lumby's translation[19] of the verb as "I trembled."

[15] Zacher's *Zeitschrift*, IV, 216.
[16] *Von Kaedmon bis Kynewulf*, Berlin, 1913; p. 87.
[17] *Die Syntaktischen Erscheinungen im Be Domes Daege*. Halle, 1899, p. 32.
[18] *Trans. Phil. Soc.*; 1877-79, p. 4.
[19] *E. E. T. S.*, 65.

The implication is that Sweet also regards this form as a real present form. There is nothing in this form to cause any confusion. Bül-bring[20] points out that after a long root-syllable a double consonant is often simplified, especially in late documents. There is nothing unusual, therefore, in finding the spelling *ondraede* for *ondraedde*, the weak preterit of the so-called reduplicating verb *draedan*.

I have found no examples of the historical present in the prose documents;[21] but there are several uses of the present which might be confused with it.

> And heom wearð hyll gegearwod, and hi þaer *wunjað* on ecan forwyrde.[22]

The adjective *ece* shows that this present form expresses future action. The present form is used here to express an action that began in past time (when hell was prepared for the fallen angels), extends through the present, and continues into the future.

> La, hwylc wunder bið, þeah se mennisca deofol synfullum mote heardlice derjan, þonne god geþafoð þaet he mot on his agenum halgum sylc wunder gewyrcan, þaet Enoh and Elias þurh þone þeodfeond gemartrode weorðað.[23]

The writer is describing the coming of Antichrist. The reference is to the well-known prophecy that Enoch and Elijah will be slain by Antichrist. If the context did not inform us of this, we might regard *weorðað* as a historical present, though, of course, it is clearly a future.

> And sum wif hatte Venus, seo waes Joves dohtor, and seo waes swa ful and swo fracod on galnysse, þaet hyre agen broðor wið hy gehaemde, þaes þe man saede, þurh doefles lare; and þa yfelan *wurðjað* þa haeþenan eac for healice faemnan.[24]

Here *wurþjað* is a real present tense. It makes a statement which the writer believes to be true for the time of speaking.

> On sunnandaeg waeron englas gesceapene. . . . On sunnandaeg laedde drihten his folc of Egyptum þurh þa readan sae drium fotum. On sunnandaeg *is* seo acennednes ures drihtnes haelendes Cristes.[25]

The presence of *is* in this series of preterites is somewhat striking. Does the writer mean to say, "Our Lord . . . was born on Sunday"? or "Sunday is the nativity of Our Lord"? An answer to this question will help us solve the difficulty in this passage. If the writer

[20] *Altenglisches Elementarbuch*, p. 554.
[21] See the bibliography for a list of the prose works read.
[22] Wulfstan's *Homilies*, Ed. Napier, p. 8, l. 9.
[23] *Ibid.*, 85, 17-20.
[24] *Ibid.*, 107: 13-17.
[25] *Ibid.*, 230; 14-24.

meant to say "was born," he used an unusual expression; "wearð gecenned" is the usual phrase. For examples see Grein, and Bosworth-Toller. *Acennednes* means "nativity"; *i. e.*, the church celebration of the Nativity. This is clearly the meaning here, a meaning which fits in well with the discussion of the sanctity and proper observance of the Sabbath. Dr. J. R. Hulbert has suggested to me that this expression is probably influenced by the way of looking at events in the church year. There was a regular formula for listing the various days in the church year. The following examples from the O. E. *Martyrology* will illustrate this formula.

On þonne þriddan daeg bið sancte Johannes tid, þaes godspelleres. Dec. 27.
On þonne feower ond twentegðan daeg þaes monðes bið se seofoða worolde daeg. March 24.

The Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle* shows a few interesting examples of the Old and Middle English use of tenses.

And sona þaer aefter sende se cyng him ond se arceb of Cantwarbyrig to Rome 'aefter þes arceb pallium' and an 'munec' mid him Warner is gehaten."[26]

Is gehaten is, of course, a real present. The statement holds true for the time of writing.

1031. "Her com Cnut a (gan to Engla lande). Sona swa he becom to E. he geaf in to Christes cyrican on Cantwarebyri þa haefenan on Sandwic and ealla þa gerihta þe þaer of *arisað*. of aeiþer healfe þare haefene."[27]

The present here makes an assertion which was true in the year 1031 and which was also true at the time of the writing of our MS. In MS. F. the entry for the year 47 shows an interesting use of the present tense. "Marcus se godspellere in Egipter aginð writan þe godspell." Viewed from one point of view, the present here does express an action which began and ended in past time. Mark's composition of the gospel antedated the entry in the Chronicle. But the entries in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle were written in such a manner as to create the illusion that they were entered during the year opposite the space in which they stand. They are, so to speak, "fake" entries, or calendar entries. The writer of this entry wrote just as one who lived in the year 47 would have written it. There is no reason whatsoever for regarding this tense as a historical present.

This collection of doubtful presents represents the gleanings from a considerable mass of material. The number of doubtful cases,

[26] Laud MS. Ed. Earle and Plummer, p. 246, l. 7.
[27] Parker MS., Ed. Earle and Plummer, p. 158.

therefore, is relatively small in comparison with the number of cases where modern writers would probably have used a historical present. Even if we were to regard all of these doubtful presents as historical presents, we should be compelled to conclude that the historical present was extremely rare in Old English. If my reasons for rejecting them are correct, we can safely say that the historical present, as a linguistic usage, does not occur in Old English.

D. THE HISTORICAL PRESENT IN THE LATIN WRITINGS IN ENGLAND

Although the historical present does not occur in Old English, there are numerous instances of this use of the present in Latin works written in England during the O. E. period. I shall quote a few examples from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica.*

"Respondebant Scoti, quia non ambos eos caperet insula, sed possumus," inquiunt, "salubre vobis dare consilium."[28]

Caesar, et navibus onerariis atque actuariis circiter octoginta praeparatis, in Brittanniam *transvehitur.*[29]

At ubi turbo persecutionis quievit . . . *renovant* ecclesias ad solum usque destructas; basilicas sanctorum martyrum *fundant, construant,*[4] *perficiunt,* ac veluti victricia signa passim *propalant;* dies festos *celebrant.*[30]

. . . apud Britannias Gratianus Municeps tyrannus *creatur* et *occiditur.* Hujus loco Constantinus ex infima militia . . . *eligitur.*[31]

Sed hi, conscientia puniente deterriti, *jungunt* cum parentibus preces et curationem parvulae a sacerdotibus *deprecantur;* qui inclinatos animo adversarios intuentes orationem breviter fundant; ad deinde Germanus plenum Spiritu Sancto *invocat* Trinitatem.[32]

These selections, chosen at random, show that the historical present was common in the writings of Bede.[33] When one considers the absence of the historical present in Old English, he is struck by the frequent occurrence of this present in the Latin works of an Englishman.

On the subject of the use of the historical present in translations, Maetzner (II, 69) says: "This usage is completely foreign to Anglo-Saxon, and if the Gothic translation of the gospels sometimes leaves the Greek historical present still standing, the Anglo-Saxon presents

[28] Book I, Chapter I, p. 32, ed. J. A. Giles.
[29] *Ibid.,* I, 2, p. 36.
[30] *Ibid.,* I, 8, p. 52.
[31] *Ibid.,* p. 58.
[32] *Ibid.,* pp. 80-82.
[33] The Old English translation avoids the historical present.

the preterite." I have tested this statement by comparing the Old English translation of the gospels with the Latin original, and have found Maetzner's statement to be true. I cite a few examples from the *Gospel of Saint John.*

The Latin Historical Present	The English Translation
I, 21, 38. *dicit*	*cweð, cwaeð*
28 *videt*	*gesaeh*
I, 39, 41, 45, 46, 47, 48, 51	
dicit:	*cweð*

There are approximately ninety-three examples of the Latin historical present in this gospel, but in no case is the Latin present rendered by an English present. A study of the other gospels shows the same avoidance of the present.

The Blickling Homilies are based on Latin originals. Max Förster[34] has made a study of the sources of some of the homilies. He points out that the influence of the Latin construction is very strong and states that some of the translations are slavish copying of the Latin. Yet in none of the cases cited by him have I found a Latin historical present rendered by an English present. For example:

Ecce, iam, iste Jesus suae divinitatis fulgore *fugat* omnes tenebras mortis, et firma ima carcerum *confregit*, etc.[35]

The Old English has "hafa . . . geflemed . . . and hafa to-brocen."

There is one interesting example of the present of citation which superficially seems to be a historical present:

Þonne cyþeð se godspellere þaet seo eadige faemnen swarode and þus saede, etc.[36]

In the Laud MS. of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle[37] the historical present occurs in a Latin entry.

Cireneius Karolo imperator legatos suos cum pace *mittit.*

These quotations from the translations show that the historical present was consciously and repeatedly avoided. This avoidance is more significant than the absence of the historical present in Old English. It is natural to suppose that it should occur in translations from a language which employed this present. But I have found no

[34] Herrig's *Archiv* 91, 179 ff.
[35] Homily VII, lines 85-91.
[36] P. 9, l. 18. *E. E. T. S.* edition.
[37] Earle and Plummer, p. 59. I should prefer to call this a "fake" entry, and a real present tense. See the discussion of the quotations from the *Chronicle.*

case of the historical present in the translations, not even in those works most strongly influenced by the Latin original. The reason for this avoidance of the historical present will be discussed in the proper place.

E. MIDDLE ENGLISH

I have read some thirty representative Middle English documents[38] from which I shall cite all of the very early examples of the historical present and representative examples from the later works. The arrangement of the quotations will be chronological. All cases where the present and preterit are identical in form will be rejected. Such occurrences are common in Kentish, especially with verbs of the fourth and fifth ablaut series.

Twelfth Century Homilies.	No examples.
History of the Holy Rood Tree.	No examples.
Saint Katherine.	One example.

> þaet nan ne seide na wiht
> ah seten stille ase stan,
> *cwich* ne *cweth* þer never an.   (1252-54.)

Einenkel's note reads: "The form *cwich* is remarkable for the loss of the inflectional consonant, or rather its dissolution in the preceding guttural. In *cweth* this loss is quite common. The root vowel of *cwich* makes it probable that the form is derived from O. E. *cwician* and not *cweccan*. *Cweth*, like *cwich*, is historical present; the preterit form of the same person is *quoth.*" We may reject *cweð* here and in lines 379, 1148, and 2444, for the preterit *cweð* is common enough in Middle English, especially in the Kentish dialect. It seems simpler to call this form a variant preterit with *quoð* than to regard it as a historical present. There is no variant for *cwic*. MS. R. has *cwic* and *cwed*. *Cwic* is therefore certainly a historical present.

It is interesting to note that no historical present of the Latin original is rendered by a present of the English. The translation is not a literal rendering of the Latin, but it is strongly influenced by the Latin style.

Seinte Marherete.	No examples.
Saint Juliana.	No examples.
Hali Meidenhad.	No examples.
Poema Morale.	No examples.
Layamon's *Brut* (12,000 lines.)	Five examples.[39]

[38] See the bibliography for a complete list of these works.
[39] The quotations are from MS. Cott. Calig. A IX (Date:c. 1200-25).

He tah hine agein ane þrowe
and þreateð þene castel.[40] (641-642.)

Brutus *sumunð* his folc.
heo weren his fulle freonð.[41] (836-837.)

þa heora fader wes dead
Alle heo nomen enne read
and hine *biburien*
in Newe Troye þere burhȝe.[42] (2095-98.)

gumen heom *igaderen*
and wurpen heo to sa grunde.
þa araeste here unfriþe
over al me brac þene grið. (Otho. 4031-35.)

þo *fleð* Bruttene king
Cassibilaune.[43] (8675-76)

The Ormulum. (16,000 lines).   No examples.
Floris and *Blauncheflur.*
MS. Cott. Vitell. *c.* 1250-1300.   Seven examples, or one to every
fifty-seven lines.

and þe quene ate frome
By wepeð hire dere sone.
And the kinges herte is ful of care
þaet he *sikð* is sone for love so fare.   (53-56)

Other examples of the historical present in this MS. are to be
found in lines 30, 31, and 68. The fragmentary condition of this
MS., resulting in a frequent loss of the context for these passages,
may throw some doubt on these citations.

In MS. Cambridge Gg 4.27.2 there are seventeen examples of the
historical present, or one to every forty-eight lines.

Floris *nimeð* nu his leve
no longer nolde he bileve.
He custe hem with softe muþe.
Al wepinge he *departeð* nuþe."[44] (9-12)

Feire of him he *nimeð* leve.
No lengur nolde he bileve. (147-148)

Nu hi *cluppeð* and *cusseð*
and *makeð* togadere muchel blisse. (549-550.)

[40] Cott. Otho CXIII has *þrettede*.
[41] Madden's note reads: "R summunde."   Not in Otho.
[42] Otho has *burede*.
[43] Cott. Calig. has *fleh*.
[44] Cf. 148-149.

> Alle þat herde wordes his,
> *Bisecheð* þat he granti þis. (757-58.)
>
> Alle þoþere *biseched* þis,
> and of þe Admiral igranted *is*. (765-766.)
>
> and floriz he *maked* stonde uprijt,
> and þer he dubbede him to knijt.
> Nu boþe togadere þes childre for blisse
> *Falled* to his fet hem to kisse.[45] (783-786.)

The Trentham MS. (*c.* 1440) is too late to throw much light on the origin of the historical present, but I have read it for the sake of comparison with the other MSS. There are thirty-one examples of the historical present, or one to every thirty-four lines. The manuscripts of this poem, therefore, show, in order of date, a steady increase in the frequency of the historical present. Since the subject matter of the manuscripts is constant, the varying degree of the frequency of the historical present is to be explained by the difference in date between the manuscripts or by the difference in the scribes. As will be shown below, a study of *King Horn* affords similar results. This steady increase in the use of the historical present is significant. It will be discussed in greater detail later on.

King Horn.[46]

Cambr. MS. (*c.* 1250)	No examples.
Harl. MS. (*c.* 1300-1325)	Four examples.[47]
Laud MS. (1300-1325)	Two examples.[48]

Genesis and Exodus (*c.* 1250) Twenty-three examples in 2536 lines (*Genesis*), and twenty-three in 1626 lines (*Exodus*). These examples are too numerous to quote. The line references are as follows: *Genesis* 379, 381, 391-3, 408, 412, 465, 1172, 1487, 1717, 1719, 1736, 1738, 2028-2031, 2037, 2148, 2226, 2313-4, 2447-9; *Exodus* 2544, 2703-4, 2705, 2857, 3022, 3061-2, 3243-4, 3373, 3625, 3640, 3704-5, 3742-3, 3808-9, 3953, 3964, and 3970.

    Havelok (*c.* 1280).   Three examples (3000 ll).

[45] Other examples occur in lines 32, 119, 149, 448, 465, 526, 632, and 699.

[46] Theo. Wissmann's critical text of *King Horn* (*Q. und F* 45, 1 ff.) shows no occurrence of the historical present.

[47] Lines 240, 385, 562, 73.

[48] Lines 135-136, 279.

Of Goldeboru shul we nou laten,
þat nouth ne *blinneth* forto graten
þet sho *liggeth* in prisoun. (328-330.)

Alle þe oþere weren ful kene,
A red þei *taken* hem bi-twene,
þat he sholde him bi-halve. (1832-33.)

On the morwen, hwan it was day,
He *stirt* up sone, and nouth ne lay. (811-2.)

I do not regard *stirt* as a historical present. Bradley-Stratmann gives the preterit as *sterte* and *sturte*. The form *stirt*, however, occurs in lines 1147, 2256, and 2736, in each case in the phrase *stirt up*. Skeat gives *stirt* as a preterit. The usual Chaucerian forms are *stert* for the present and *sterte* for the preterit. We may, therefore, regard these occurrences in *Havelok* as doubtful examples of the historical present or as preterites with the elision of the final *e* before a following vowel. The fact that all of the examples occur in the phrase *stirt up* inclines me towards the latter view.

In this poem there is an interesting example of the interruption of the narrative by the insertion of the author's own opinion.

Jhese crist that lazoun
To live broucte from dede bondes,
He *lese* hire wit hise hondes. (331-333.)

Such a use of the present must not be confused with the historical present. This use of the present is found in the earliest stages of the language.

It is a little surprising to find that the author of *Havelok*, a poem in which the historical present occurs, avoids translating the historical presents of the Old French by English presents. The poem is not a literal translation of the French; the adaptation is very loose and free. But even in those passages which are closest to the French original a preterit is invariably used to translate the historical presents of the French.

French	English
fet, 217	*garte*, 189
fet, 89	*graythede*, 706
vint, 719	*cam*, 1926
fet, 843	*dide*, 2192

In the *Early South English Legendary*, or *Lives of Saints* (MS. Laud 108 Bodl. *c.* 1285-95) there is one example of the historical present:

> Faste heo *loken* alle þe dore and
> leten him longe þere beo
> Ope þe swerdes pointes in
> deorkhede he ne miȝte noþing i-seo. (p. 188, l. 109.)

This is the only unambiguous historical present in the *Legendary*. There are numerous apparent historical presents, where the preterit and the present of the verb are identical in form: *wende*, 13:432; *wendan*, 31:47; *wepen*, 22:101; *beren*, 32:108, etc. A wish or a prayer of the author is often inserted in the narrative.

> Nouȝ crist helpe þis holi man. for he is ȝuyt povere inouȝ. (138: 1112.)
> ore loverd helpe nouþe seint þomas for oþur frend naȝ he non.
> Among so manie tyraunz for to come þat weren alle is fon. (128: 749.)
> Swete Jesus beo is help; oþur frend nadde he non. (134: 960.)

Note the shift of tense in the last two quotations, and compare:

> Nou helpe crist seint þomas. for neode he haȝ þere-to
> Nou boþe þe kingus beoȝ is fon. ȝware may he nou go? (153:1621)
> Joye þare was i-nou of treon and herbes, þikke i-nouȝ biset in eche side,
> And of swete preciouse stones þat briȝte *schynen* and wide. (221: 40-42.)

The action of the verb *schynen* is not present; the action is confined to no time-sphere, for the statement of the qualities of an object is timeless. The sentence could be written "bright-shining stones" without altering the meaning in the least. Or we may regard *schynen* as the preterit plural of a verb of the first ablaut series.

Cursor Mundi. After 1300 the historical present is so common that further citations would not be of interest. In the *Cursor Mundi* (MS. Cotton Vesp. A iii, *c.* 1300-1350) there are fifty-three examples of the historical present. They occur in lines 6, 487, 723, 726, 729, 993, 995, 996, 997, 1045-6, 1572, 2853, 3161, 3444, 3596, 3597, 4195, 4261, 4429, 5189-9, 5434-5, 6426, 7774, 7778, 7861, 7862, 7887, 8030, 9352, 10997, 11521, 11837, 11838, 12031, 13268, 13512, 14011, 14286, 15225-6, 16337, 16339, 16442, 16443, 16525, 16528, 16544, 16673, 16923, 21404, 24020, 24368, 24545, 24863. The Fairfax MS. (*c.* 1350-1400) keeps thirty-three of these; the Göttingen MS. (*c.* 1300-1350) forty-six, and the Trinity College MS. (*c.* 1400-1425) thirty-one. These figures show that the present and the preterit were easily interchanged. Since this interchange does not bear directly on our study of the origin of the historical present, it cannot be discussed here. The interchange seems to be for no particular reason. The use of preterit or a present is probably determined by the choice of the individual writer.

The Debate of the Body and Soul. In a poem like *The Debate* there is little occasion to use the historical present; for there are few narrative passages. The following presents may be regarded as historical presents:

> As he shulde to tournement
> An hundred develes on him *dreven.* (Royal MS. 522-23).

This form may be a present from *draefen* or from *drefen* (O. E. *draefan*, *drefan*, weak verbs.). Or it may be a variant spelling for the preterit plural of *drīfen* (O. E. *drīfan*, preterit plural *drifon*, *driofan*).[49] Auch. has *dong*, Laud and Vernon *dongen*, and Digby *dungen.*

> þe erþe opened and tochon
> Smok and smorþer þerout *welle.* (Auch. 547-48.)

I regard this as a clear historical present. L. has *wal*, V. and D. *up þer wel*, and R. *gan welle.*[50]

The Pricke of Conscience, and *The English Prose Treatises* of Richard Rolle of Hampole show no examples of the historical present.

Lybeaus Disconus (1325-1350). In the 2130 lines of this poem there are eleven clear examples of the historical present: 497, 535, 542-44, 952, 956, 1217, 1350, 1393, 1958.

The Pearl (1360-1400). The nature of *The Pearl* precludes an extensive use of the historical present. The clear examples of this present occur in lines, 75, 77, 79, 128, 177, 185, 191, 507, 509-10, 511, 512, 513, 514. Five of these examples occur in rhyme.

Piers Plowman. The historical present is fairly common in *Piers Plowman.* Excluding all examples found in two or more versions, I have collected thirty-two examples from the three versions. There are many presents which it would be impossible to classify to the satisfaction of all readers. A shift in tone often gives the present the force of customary action. A glance at the examples will show that the preterit and the historical present occur side by side with apparently no difference in meaning. In some cases the preterit precedes, in others it follows, the historical present. I have quoted from the parallel texts in order to show the variations in the use of the historical present in any given case. The line references are to Skeat's *Three Parallel Texts.* The numbers in parenthesis refer to Dr. T. A. Knott's critical text of A[1].

[49] This explanation was suggested to me in a class discussion by Dr. T. A. Knott.
[50] For this poem I have used as a text Dr. Knott's unpublished collations of all the MSS.

A. Founden hem fantasyes and folles hem maaden. (36 [36])
B. Feynen hem fantasyes and foles hem maketh. (36.)
C. And fynde up foule fantesyes and foles hem maken. (37.)
The lewede men likede him wel and leeveth his speche. (A. 69.)

    levede and likede. (Knott, 69.)
    leved and lyked. (B. 72.)
    lyvede and likeden. (C, 70.)
Ther hoveth an hundret in houves of selk (A, 84)
    hovede. (Knott, 84.)
    hoved. (B, 210.)
    hovede (C, I, 159.)
Cookes and heore knaves cryen 'hote pies,' hote. (A, 104.)
    crieth. (Knott, 104.)
    crieden. (B, 225.)
    crieden. (C, 226.)
Nou Simonye and Sivyle stondeth forth bothe
Unfolding the feffement that Falsness made
And thus bygonnen the gomes and gradden hem hyʒe. (A, II, 57-59.)
    stondth . . . begynne, grede. (Knott, II, 53-56.)
    stonden . . . unfoldeth . . . beginneth to greden (B, 69-70.)
    stoden . . . unfelde. (C, 72-73.)
In the date of the devil the deed was aseled. (A, II, 81.)
    is aseled. (Knott, II, 77.)
    I assele. (B, II, 112.)
    is a-seled. (C, III, 114.)
Herto assentid Syvyle, but symonye, etc. (A, III, 110.)
    assenteth. (Knott, 106.)
    assenteth. (B, 141.)
    a-sentyd. (C, 155.)

Other examples occur in II, 158, 160, 187; III, 1, 12, 99, 100;
IV, 14, 22-23, 59-60, 146-147; V, 157; VI, 1; VII, 58, 99-100; VIII,
92; XI, 86; B, II, 71-73, 141, 183-185, 211; III, 103-104; IV, 1, 12-14,
23; V, 134, 304-305, 314; VII, 108; XIII, 347-348; XVII, 78-80;
XIX, 266-267; XX, 149-150, 167, 361, 366. I do not list the occur-
rences in C which are not also found in A and B.

Gawayne and the Green Knight (1350-1400). The historical
present is unusually common in this poem. There are 252 examples
in the 2530 lines of the poem, or, roughly speaking, one to every
ten lines. The occurrences are too common to list.

Chaucer. The historical present is used very frequently by
Chaucer. A reading of any extensive narrative passage will afford
illustrations of this use of the present.

In this section I have collected the facts in regard to the historical
present in Old and Middle English. They may be briefly summarized:

1. The historical present does not occur in Old English.[51]

2. It is, however, very common in the Latin writings written in England during the Old English period.

3. The Old English translators consistently and repeatedly avoided translating a historical present of the Latin by an English historical present.

4. The historical present appeared first in English at the beginning of the thirteenth century; it became fairly common before the end of the century; and by the end of the fourteenth century it was used with the greatest freedom.

These are the facts. The theories which have been advanced to explain these facts will be discussed in the second section of this paper. Before choosing any particular theory we must apply it to the facts and determine whether it satisfactorily explains them.

II

We have seen that six different theories have been offered to explain the origin of the historical present in English. No writer on this subject, however, has supported his theory by any considerable body of facts. We now have such a body of facts and are in a position to apply each theory to them as they have been listed in the preceding section, and so to study the merits of each theory.[1]

We have seen that Maetzner[2] explained the absence of the historical present in Old English as due to a lack of vivid imagination on the part of the Old English writers. To show the weakness of such an argument it is necessary only to call attention to the fact that Bede often used the historical present in his Latin. His *Historia Ecclesiastica* could hardly be called vividly imaginative. Lack

[51] The two examples in *Christ and Satan* are exceptions to this general statement.

[1] It would be interesting to find out in what dialect the historical present first occurred. But the scarcity of early documents makes such an investigation futile.

[2] English Grammar, II, 68 ff. "The historical present seems to have been especially developed in Old English out of popular poetry and not without the influence of Old French. . . . The historical present and its interchange with the preterite (definite and perfect) was familiar to Old French poetry and even in prose in the most varied commixture. . . . This usage is completely foreign to Anglo-Saxon, and if the Gothic translations of the gospels sometimes leaves the Greek historical present still standing, the A. S. presents the preterite. The A. S. poetry lacks that warmth which gives scope for the subjective view."

of imagination will not explain why the historical present was consistently avoided, even in those translations which most slavishly followed the original. Nor will it explain why all of the Germanic languages fail to use it in the earlier stages of their development. I do not think that this theory demands any further consideration; it is too completely subjective.

Wunderlich[3] believes that the historical present developed naturally and logically from presents closely related to it. This seems a logical explanation, but it will not account for the absence of the historical present in Old English. Nor will it explain its apparently sudden appearance in Middle English. The presents which were classified and discussed in the first section of this paper are related to the historical present, but they are not closely related. In all of them there is an element of real present time. The historical present, on the contrary, expresses a past action, an action which has absolutely no connection with present time. This characteristic of the historical present sharply distinguishes it from presents related to it.

Moreover, the gradual development for which Wunderlich argues did not take place until the historical present appeared independently in M. H. G., and in M. E. We shall have to explain why no historical present gradually developed in the older stages of these languages. Wunderlich's theory gives us no answer to these questions.

We have seen that Brinkmann,[4] Grimm,[5] and Maetzner[6] are of

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[3] *Deutsche Satzbau*, I, 158 ff. Wunderlich classifies the presents which resemble the historical present and which may be confused with it. He then turns to a discussion of the historical present. "Darauf (Grimm's statement) stütz sich die seit Grimm oft wiederholte Behauptung, dass das historische Praesens der älteren Sprache fremd sie. Dem entgegen stehen aber manigfache Zeugnisse aus Denkmälern, wo unbeirrt durch eine Vorlage und unbeeinflusst durch fremdes Muster das historische Praesens durchbricht, dessen Wurzeln zum Teil eben in oben besprechenen Wendungen liegen."

[4] "Jetzt ist diese Ausdrucksweise ein allgemeiner Gebrauch des Französischen, Englischen, Deutschen, aller romanischen Mundarten, wie des Lateinischen und Griechischen. Es erschient jedoch als auffallender Charakterzug der älteren germ. Mundarten, vom Gothischen an bis zum Mittel hochdeutschen das Widerstreben, das Praesens in dieser Weise zu gebrauchen, und zwar tritt dies Widerstreben um so entschiedenes hervor, je älter die Mundart ist, so dass wir bei Ulfilas fast ein jedes historisches Praesens des Griechischen durch das Praeteritum übersetzt finden. . . . Das steht offenbar im Zusammenhange mit der anderen Eigentümlichkeit des Gothischen und Althochdeutschen, keine besondere Form für das Futur zu haben, und das fehlende Futur durch das Praesens vertreten zu lassen."

the opinion that the historical present is a borrowing from Old French. Let us see whether the historical present occurs most frequently in works influenced by French models. We may divide the earliest Middle English documents into two classes: those based upon Latin originals, and those based upon French. In the first class belong the *Homilies*, *The Holy Rood Tree*, *Saint Katherine*, *Saint Marherete*, *Saint Juliana*, *Hali Meidenhad*, *The Legendary*, and *Genesis and Exodus*. In the second class are *The Brut*, *Floris and Blauncheflur*, *Havelok*, and *Horn*. Of the first group *Saint Katherine* shows one example of the historical present, *The Legendary* one, and *Genesis and Exodus* forty-six. Of the second group *The Brut* (the first 12,000 lines) furnishes five clear examples, the Cotton MS. of *Floris and Blauncheflur* seven, the Cambridge MS. seventeen, the Harl. MS. of *Horn* four, the Laud MS. two. The last two MSS. are after 1300.

It must be remembered also that the saints' lives and the homilies are of such a nature as to call for the use of few historical presents. I do not think, therefore, that the difference in the use of the historical present in the two groups is great enough either to serve as a basis of an argument or to be of any value to our discussion. No sound arguments can be based on such evidence. If this phenomenon is to be explained as a borrowing from the French, how are we to account for the fact that the earliest manuscript of *Havelok*, which, however, is later than the earliest occurrences of the historical present, shows no examples of this use of the present? Or how are we to explain the avoidance of the historical present in those passages which are closest to the O. F. original? We have seen that no historical present of the original is rendered by a present in English. *Havelok*, of course, is a very loose adaptation of the French text, but the influence of the French, not the translation from it, is the basis of the argument for the French influence on English tenses. If we accept the theory of French influence, we shall have to assume that each Germanic language made a separate borrowing, at about the same time, from some language which used the historical present. Sweet explains the historical present in Old Norse as a borrowing

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"Das Angelsächische macht von diesem gemeingermanischen Zuge keine Ausnahme. . . . und im Englischen ist ebenso wie im Mhd. das allmähliche Eindringen des hist. praes. dem Einfluss des Altfranzösichen zuzuschreiben." *Syntax* II, 682-3.

    [5] *Deutsche Gram.* IV, 140 ff.
    [6] See quotation from Maetzner above, p. 21.

from Old Irish. This borrowing, of course, is entirely possible, but we should, if we can, accept a theory which will account for this phenomenon in the whole group of Germanic languages. In choosing between the various theories we should, when all the other factors are equal, choose that theory which explains both the absence of the historical present in Old English and its appearance in Middle English. This the theory of French influence cannot do; it concerns only one side of the question. For these reasons I am unable to put much faith in this theory.

Jespersen[7] attacks the theory of French influence on different grounds. He would explain the historical present as a colloquial expression, the absence of which in written Old English is to be explained by the fact that we have no popular or colloquial remains from this period of the language. He maintains that the historical present occurs first in popular poetry. It will be worth while to examine his theory in detail.

It is true that we have no popular documents from the Old Engglish period. But we cannot assume that the historical present would be found if we had such documents. There is no direct proof or disproof of such a supposition. We must depend, therefore, upon indirect evidence, the evidence obtained from the study of the historical present in other languages, and the evidence of the Middle

[7] "Men selvom den dramatiske nutid saaledes er en slags stilistisk kunstgreb, er den ingen grund til at tro at denne udtryksmaade ikke skulde vaere folkelig; den er det sikkert endogsaa i høj grad, som man kan iagttage ved at lytte til almuesfolks beretninger om egne oplevelser. Denne fortaellemaade er saa naturlig, ja uundgaaelig, at der ikke er fjerneste grund til at formode at den nogetsteds skulde skyldes litteraert laan fra et folk til et andet. Dette antages dog ofte. Saaledes mener Sweet at det "historiske praesens" paa engelsk skulde skyldes fransk og latinsk indflydelse; i de islandske sagaer, hvor det jo findes i stor udstraekning, mener han at det er laant fra oldirsk. (Phil. Soc *Proceedings* 1885-87, s. xlv, *Grammar* §2228.) Ligeledes mener Einenkel og andre, at det i middelengelsk skyldes oldfransk. Daerimod taler imidlertid den omstaendighed at det i middelengelsk isaer findes i den folkelige digtning, hvor fremmed indflydelse paa syntaktisk brug er meget lidt sandsynlig. At det dramatiske praesens slet ikke eller kun sjaeldent findes i oldengelsk, beroer rimeligvis paa at vi daer helt savner livlige fortaellinger i dagligligs prosa af samme art som sagaerne. I det hele taget hører faenomenet til den klasse hverdagsudtryksmaader som først optraeder ret sent i skrift, fordi de saa at sige betragtedes som liggende under litteraturens vaerdighed. Sammenlign hermed at det ikke findes Homer, men i rigeligt maal hos Herodot. Delbrück har utvivlsomt ret i sit udtryk at det er "gewiss uralt-volkstümlich." (*Syntax* II, 261.). *Tid og Tempus*, 386.

English writings.   Moreover, we must bear in mind that the center
of the discussion is the historical present in English and the other
Germanic languages, not the origin of the historical present in general.
I think that there can be little doubt regarding the justice of Jes-
persen's assertion that the historical present is found most frequently
in colloquial speech.   And it is logical, also, to assume that the
origin of the historical present was probably colloquial.   But if we
accept this much of Jespersen's argument, it does not follow that
we shall accept his theory as an explanation of the origin of the his-
torical present in English.   For the main problem here is not the
appearance of the historical present in Middle English, or in Middle
High German, but the absence of this use of the present in the older
stages of these languages and the conscious avoidance of it in trans-
lating Latin into Old English.   If possible, we must explain the dif-
ference between the usage of the Germanic languages, on the one
hand, and that of Latin, Greek, and the Romance languages, on the
other.   If Jespersen is right, it is extremely surprising that no Old
English writer inadvertently used the historical present, a collo-
quialism which would be known to him, and which it would be difficult
for him consistently to avoid.   And it would be still more surprising
to think that all of the translators in the Old English period so strongly
felt the historical present as a colloquialism that they avoided it with
perfect consistency.   Jespersen gives no citations to support his
assertion that the historical present is found most frequently in
colloquial or popular documents in Middle English.   It would be
extremely difficult to make a classification of the Middle English
documents into colloquial (*folkelige*) and non-colloquial works.   No
classification of this kind would meet with the approval of all students.
A general classification, however, may be made: *The Brut, Floris and
Blauncheflur, Havelok*, and *Horn* seem more or less colloquial in style
and tone; the *Homilies*, the three saints' lives, *Hali Meidenhad,
Genesis and Exodus*, and *The Legendary* are more dignified, standard-
ized, and literary.   We have seen that there is no appreciable dif-
ference between these two groups in the use of the historical present.
Such a classification will not help us much in deciding between the
various theories.

   If we apply the terms popular or colloquial to those documents
which were written for the people who were unable to read the original
Latin or French, then practically all of the English literature of this

period would fall under this head, and such a test would not serve as the basis of an argument. We face the disagreeable fact that nearly all of the literature of this period is based upon foreign models. There is no marked difference between the works of this period in the use of the historical present, regardless of the method by which we classify them.

I do not believe that Jespersen's theory can be proved or disproved. The evidence that I have collected does not support his theory regarding the absence of the historical present in Old English. Jespersen's discussion of the colloquial origin of the historical present in general is admirable, but it does not satisfactorily explain the English historical present.

Erdmann,[8] Brinkmann,[9] and Sweet[10] believe that the historical present must be studied in connection with the periphrastic future. Their theory may be stated as follows: Since Germanic had no characteristic future form, the present had to serve a triple function: it was used to express general truths, present actions, and future actions. The use of this form to indicate past events would have caused ambiguity and confusion by crowding too many meanings upon one form of the verb. This theory is so closely connected with Behaghel's theory of *Aktionsart* that it will be best to discuss them together.

Behagel's theory, which is accepted by Willmanns, is such an important one that it must be studied in detail. I shall quote him at length. His discussion of the origin of the historical present is incidental to his study of the sequence of tenses, and is to be found on pages 199 ff. of his *Der Gebrauch der Zeitformen*.

"Bekanntlich besitzt das Deutsche ursprünglich kein Praesens historicum; heutzutage ist es allgemein, und zwar eignet es auch der Rede des Volks, wodurch jeder Gedanke an einen etwaigen Einfluss des Lateinischen oder des Romanischen

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[8] *Grundzüge der deutschen Syntax* 140. "Auch vergangene Handlungen können bei anschaulicher Erzählung als gegenwärtig dargestellt werden, Zu dieser Anwendung des Praesens zeigt die ältere Sprache keine Neigung. wahrscheinlich weil bei der allgemein üblichen Verwendung des Praesens für das Futurum Undeutlichkeit hätten entstehen können, wenn dasselbe auch von vergangenen Handlungen gebraucht worden wäre."

[9] *Syntax* II, 682-3. See the quotations from Brinkmann, footnotes to pages 22-23.

[10] *Phil. Soc. Proceedings* 1885-87, p. xlv. "Mr. Sweet believed that the historical present was not quite natural in the Teutonic languages either in late or early times. The present being also used for the future, was unsuitable to express the past as well."

ausgeschlossen wird: ein schlagender Beleg für den Satz, dass aus Übereinstimmung in syntaktischen Dingen nicht auf Hinaufreichen der betreffenden Konstruktion in eine gemeinsame Sprachperiode geschlossen werden darf. Das Praesens historicum besteht im Sanskrit (Delbrück und Windisch, *Syntaktische Forschungen* II, s. 89 u. 131) wie im Griechischen, im Lateinischen wie im Slavischen und Deutschen; und doch hat sich dasselbe, z. B. im Slavischen so gut wie im Deutschen erst in historischer Zeit entwickelt. (Miklosich, *Gram.* IV, 778.)"

"Für dieses Auftreten selbst die Gründe anzugeben, hat, wie vorhin bemerkt (s. 200), seine Schwierigkeiten. Vielleicht aber können wir die Ungewissheit doch noch um eine Stufe zurückschieben. Einen Grund für das verhältnismässig späte Auftreten des Praes. hist. könnte man darin sehen, dass das Praesens erstt dann die Funktion eines Präteritums zu übernehmen vermocht hätte, nachdem es die des Futurs an eine selbständige Form abgegeben. Indessen ist es mir zweifelhaft, ob jene Übertragung wirklich die condicio sine qua non war; denn das Praesens hat in Wahrheit die futurische Funktion auf den heutigen Tag nicht völlig verloren, muss also doch zur Bezeichnung der drei verschiedenen Zeitformen dienen. Das Slavische hat ja auch keine vom Praesens geschiedene Form des Futurs und kennt doch das historische Praesens. (Miklosich, IV, 778)

"Die Erklärung scheint vielmehr auf einem ganz andern Gebiete zu liegen. Die Regel über das Auftreten jenes die Vergangenheit schildernden Praesens im. Mhd. kann man auch so fassen, dass da, wo das Praesens Vergangenes veranschaulicht, weitaus überwiegend das Praesens von imperfektiven Verben verwendet wird. Soll nun in einem Satze wie *Parz.* 451, 3; 'hin ritet Herzelogen fruht' ein echtes Praesens historicum im neuern Sinn gefunden werden, so muss *ritet* als perfektives Verbum gefasst werden können. Mit andern Worten: das Praes. hist. in seinem vollen Umfang kann sich erst dann ausbilden, wenn der alte Unterschied der Verba perfektiva und imperfektiva sich zu verwischen beginnt. Leider wissen wir über die Geschichte der beiden Aktionsarten für die mhd. Zeit noch so gut wie nichts."

To understand Behaghel's theory it will be necessary for us to make a rather long digression for the purpose of discussing *aktionsart*, which is the basis of the theory.

Streitberg (P. B. *B.* XV, 70-177) was the first to make a detailed study of *aktionsart* in Germanic. Since the appearance of his article a vast number of discussions have appeared.[11] Though many writers have attacked Streitberg's nomenclature and have questioned some of his conclusions, his theory in general has not been assailed. I shall give a brief summary of Streitberg's treatment of this subject. I quote from his *Urgerm. Gram.* 276 ff.

"Das indogermanische Verbalsystem kannte von Haus aus keine formalen Kategorien, die dazu bestimmt gewesen wären, die Zeitstufe (Vergangenheit,

[11] See Brugmann, *Vergl Gram.* II, 3, 1. 1913 ed., pp. 68-70 for a partial bibliography.

Gegenwart, und Zukunft) ausdrücken. Denn das, was wir Tempora zu nennen
gewohnt sint, diente ursprünglich keineswegs, zur Unterschiedung der Zeitstufen,
sondern vielmehr zur Charakterisierung der Aktionsarten, d. h. der Art und Weise,
wie der Handlung vor sich ging. Die ungemein zahlreichen Praesens-klassen,
das Perfekt und der s-Aorist (der so-genannte starke Aorist ist nur syntaktisch,
nicht aber formell ein Aorist; vielmehr gehört es seiner Bildung nach aufs engste
zum Praesens) sind vollkommen zeitlos, soweit sie nicht mit dem Augment versehn
sind. Ihr einziger Zweck ist, die verschiednen Aktionsarten von einander zu
unterscheiden. Leider sind wir bis jetzt noch nicht in der Lage, die Funktionen
aller Kategorien genau zu bestimmen; namentlich in Bezug auf die ursprünglichen
Bedeutungen der meisten Praesensklassen herrscht noch grosse Unklarheit, die
nur eine sorgfältige Durchforschung der vedischen Sprache zu heben im stande
sein wird. . . ."

"Die wichtigsten Aktionsarten sind folgende.

(1) "Die durative oder imperfektive Aktionsart. Sie stellt die Handlung
in ihrer ununterbrochnen Dauer oder Kontinuität dar; z. B. nhd. 'steigen' bedeutet
'in der Handlung des Steigens begriffen sein,' wie es die englische Wendung 'to be
mounting' aufs schärfste ausdrückt. Ebenso ist z. B. nhd. gehn 'to be going'
wie die meisten unsrer nichtzusammengesetzten Verba imperfecktiv. . . ."

(2) "Die inchoative Aktionsart. Sie drückt den ganz allmählichen Übergang
von einem Zustand in den anderen aus."

(3) "Die perfektive Aktionsart. Sie fügt dem materielen Bedeutungsinhalt
des Verbums noch den Nebenbegriff des Vollendetwerdens hinzu. Die Handlung wird
also nicht wie beim Durativ schlechthin in ihrem Fortgang, in ihrer Kontinuität
bezeichnet, sondern stets im Hinblick auf den Moment ihrer Vollendung. Dabei
ist es natürlich ganz gleichgültig, ob der Augenblick der Vollendung der Vergangen-
heit, der Gegenwart oder der Zukunft angehört; denn die Zeitstufe kann unter
keinen Umständen von der Art und Weise abhängig sein, in der sich die Handlung
vollzieht. Die Mittel, wodurch die Unterschiede in den Zeitstufen ausgedrückt
werden, müssen daher prinzipiell von denen völlig verschieden sein, wodurch die
Aktionsarten charakterisiert werden. . . ."

"Wie man sieht, hat das zusammengesetzte Verbum Perfektivbedeutung,
das Simplex dagegen ist durativ. Dies Verhältnis ist im Balto-Slavischen und im
Altgermanischen das regelmässige. Man vergleiche die Perfektivierung durch
Komposition bei den got. Verben Durativ hausjan 'hören'; d. h. 'die Fähigkeit
des Hörens in Anwendung bringen': Perfectiv ga-hausjan, 'vernehmen'; d. h.
den Moment der Vollendung der Handlung des Hörens erreichen. . . ."

"Da sich die Bedeutung eines jeden Verbalkompositums aus drei Faktoren
zusammensetzt, nämlich aus dem materiellen Bedeutungsinhalt der Präposition
und der durch die Zusammensetzung verursachten Modifikation der Aktionsart,
so leuchtet ein, dass, abgesehn von dem Unterschied der Aktionsart, das Kompo-
situm dem Simplex gegenüber einen Bedeutungszuwachs durch die materielle
Bedeutung der Präposition erfährt. Führt die Präposition keine selbständige
Existenz mehr, so kann ihre materielle Bedeutung in dem Masse verblassen, dass
bei der Zusammensetzung die Änderung der Aktionsart das einzige Ergebnis der
Verbindung ist; die Präposition ist alsdann zu einem rein formalen Mittel zum
Ausdruck der Aktionsart geworden. Im Germanischen ist das in erster Linie

bei ga- der Fall. Dieses ist daher zur Perfektiverung ganz vorzüglich geeignet.

"Neben den Momentan-perfektiven Verben, die lediglich den Augenblick des Abschlusses hervorheben und deshalb graphisch durch einen Punkt dargestellt werden, können auch solche perfektiven Verba existieren, die den Moment der Vollendung ausdrücklich einer Vorausgegangnen kontinuierlichen Thätigkeit entgegen stellen. Man kann sie als durativ-perfektiṽe[12] Verba bezeichnen. Eine eigne formale Kategorie existiert auf germanischen Boden nur in den trennbaren Verbalkompositis der neuhochdeutschen."

(4) "Die iterative Aktionsart, die eine regelmässige Wiederholung einer a) durativen, b) perfektiven Handlung ausdrückt. . . . Im Germanischen existiert keine besondere Iterativkategorie wie im Slavischen."

(5) "Die perfektische Aktionsart. Man hüte sich die perfektische Aktionsart, die ihren Namen von dem Perfekt hat, mit der eben behandelten perfektiven Aktionsart zu verwechseln; beide haben nicht das geringste miteinander gemein. Die perfektische Aktionsart bezeichnet die Handlung im Zustand des Vollendet- und Fertigseins."[13]

The soundness of Streitberg's general discussion of *aktionsart* has not been challenged. I shall, therefore, use his work as a basis for my discussion. Before taking up this subject in Old English, I shall give a brief summary of the results of his study of perfectivity in Gothic.[14] We may take Gothic as one definite illustration in a single language.

1. Gothic, like Balto-Slavic, had verbal compounds whose single elements were not separable.

2. Gothic made a distinction between perfectives and imperfectives, but it lacked a special iterative category.

3. Perfectives were made through the addition of prepositional adverbs to imperfective simplicia. Most simplicia were imperfective, but there were some perfective simplicia.[15]

4. There were also some durative simplicia which were not capable of being made perfective, or were made so only under certain restrictions.

5. *Ga-* was the particle which had given up most of its original local meaning and which was, therefore, best suited for simply modi-

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[12] Delbrück, *Syntax* II, 146 ff., maintains that perfectives (*i. e.*, forms compounded with prepositions) should be distinguished from "punctual" verbs, Streitberg's "momentan-perfektiven Verba."

[13] Wunderlich (*Der Deutsche Satzbau*, I. 149-150.) argues against Streitberg's last class. Delbrück (*Syntax*) and Brugmann (*Vergl. Gram.*) do not include perfect or inchoative *aktionsarten*.

[14] *P. B. Beiträge* XV, p. 176.

[15] See Delbrück, II, 146 ff. for an opposite view.

fying the nature of the action; *i. e.*, it could easily become a mere formal sign of perfectivity.

6. Since the old I-E s-future had been lost in Germanic, the Germanic languages had no special form for the future. The distinction between perfective and imperfective verbs, however, was used to fill up gaps in the tense system. This distinction was used in the following manner:

a) The perfective verbs could rarely express present time. The nature of their meaning made this expression almost impossible.[16] The present form of a verb of this class, therefore, could express only future or past time (*i. e.*, as an historical present). These statements hold true for Balto-Slavic, which used the present of an iterative verb to express the present action of a perfective verb. The absence of an iterative category in Germanic, however, caused a weakening of this distinction, and the perfective verbs sometimes have a present meaning. As a rule, however, Wulfila translates a Greek future by the present tense of a perfective verb.

b) A durative future could be expressed only by a periphrase with *skal*, *haban*, and *duginnan*, etc. Such a periphrase was not used invariably. It occurs most frequently in cases where clearness is necessary. In many cases the future tense remains unexpressed in the Gothic translation; *i. e.*, the Gothic uses a present tense as a substitute for the Greek future.

Delbrück differs from Streitberg in some points. He asserts that the present form of a perfective verb generally expressed present meaning. The present form of a perfective verb when used as a future emphasized the entrance or beginning of the action in the future time-sphere. The present form of an imperfective verb represented the action as enduring or continuing in the future. He emphasizes what Streitberg only suggests, that the use of a present form to express future action is only a more or less rough equivalent of the Greek future.

We are now prepared to discuss Behaghel's theory in detail. His discussion of the origin of the historical present is only incidental to his study of the sequence of tenses. His treatment of the subject is therefore very brief, and it is extremely difficult to understand just what he means. He apparently takes for granted that his reader is familiar with the subject of *aktionsart* in its relation to tense. Since

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[16] See Delbrück II, 123 ff. fcr an interesting discussion of this subject.

few readers will have the background necessary to understand the details of Behaghel's theory, it will be well to explain his theory at length.[17]

According to my interpretation, Behaghel's theory may be stated in these words: the earliest uses of the present to express past actions were in connection with imperfective verbs. Grimm had pointed out that such presents generally presented the pictures of a definite situation, or represented a moment of rest in the action. The action was represented as continuing, with no indication of the attainment of the goal; *i. e.*, the verb was imperfective. If, in the example quoted by Behaghel—*hin ritet Herzelogen fruht*—, *ritet* is a "real historical present in the new sense," *i. e.*, if it denotes an action which began and ended in past time, an action which is equivalent to the action of a preterit tense, *ritet*[18] surely may be regarded as a perfective verb.[19] But *hin ritet* was originally imperfective; *i. e.*, it denoted an action beginning in past time and continuing in past time, with no indication of the attainment of the goal. The original distinction between perfectives and imperfectives had begun to weaken. Until this weakening had taken place, the historical present could not be used "in its full extent."

What Behaghel means by "in seinem vollen Umfang" may not be perfectly clear to the casual reader. He means that originally the present of a perfective verb could not be used to express a past action, because the present form of such a verb generally expressed future action. So long as the present form of a perfective had this future force, it was impossible to use this form to express past actions. In other words, the historical present could not be used in connection with perfective verbs.

Behaghel attacks the theory that the historical present could not have arisen until the development of the periphrastic future had freed the present form from the necessity of expressing both present and future actions. I think that it can be shown that Behaghel's

[17] My summary will not be an abstract of Behaghel's theory. It is rather my interpretation of his remarks and an elaboration of his theory. I do not hold him responsible for any possible misinterpretation or misapplication of his theory. The reader will do well to read Behaghel for himself.

[18] Erdmann, *loc. cit.*, and Boezinger, *op. cit.* 48, regard this as a historical present.

[19] We may translate: "The son of H. rides away (thither)." This form would then convey the same meaning as the preterit *reit*.

theory does not contradict this theory, but rather confirms it.

First, Behaghel argues that the present is still used for the future in German. The same statement might be made for the English language. But this statement is true only to a very limited extent. A modifying adverb or adverbial phrase generally accompanies the verb; for example, "He leaves town to-morrow." Moreover, this use of the present as a future occurs chiefly in subordinate clauses, which take their tense from the verb of the main clause. In such clauses the verbal idea and not the tense is stressed. Such a sentence as, "If he comes, I shall be glad to see him," can be rewritten in such a way as to get rid of the subordinate clause entirely: "I shall be glad to see him come." Or a phrase may often be substituted for the subordinate clause.

In Old English, on the other hand, the present form was the usual way of expressing future actions. Modal auxiliaries were sometimes employed, but these had not yet become real futures.[20] In his *Grammar* Aelfric uses the present plus an adverb of time to express the future idea. While this device was often employed, it was by no means consistently carried out, as a reading of Aelfric himself will show.

Again, Behaghel points out that in Slavic, "which still has no future form distinguished from the present," the historical present occurs. At first glance this argument seems unanswerable. In a discussion of this kind, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that *aktionsart* in Germanic and *aktionsart* in Balto-Slavic are entirely different things.[21] In Germanic the distinction between perfectives and imperfectives is a survival of what was perhaps a vital distinction in Ur-germanic. A comparison of the force of the prefix *ga-*, the prefix most frequently employed as a means of perfectivity, in Gothic, O.H.G., O.S. and O.E. will show a gradual weakening of the perfective force of this prefix, a fact which implies that the force of this prefix was most important in Ur-germanic.

In Balto-Slavic, on the other hand, such distinctions were used to fill up gaps in the tense system. Almost every imperfective verb whose meaning was capable of being made perfective could become perfective by the addition of a perfective prefix. Since the present form of the perfectives indicated future action, the perfective was

[20] Blackburn, *The English Future.*
[21] Delbrück II, 158 ff.; Mourek, *Anz. f. d. a.*, 21, 195; Lindroth P. B. *B.*, 31, 243; Herbig, *I-F.*, 6, 157 ff., and especially 204.

as clear a sign of the future as either "shall" or "will" is in English. Leskien[22] says: "Es (das praesens des Perfektivverbums) ersetzt also, soweit es sich eben um perfektive Verba handelt, ein formales temp. Futurum."

In Germanic, however, there are no examples of new formations of perfective verbs within historic times.[23] Delbrück[24] has shown that Germanic shows only a few traces of original *aktionsarten*. Streitberg[25] has pointed out that Germanic was affected by the absence of a special iterative category. Leskien[26] says of this class of verbs:

"Das Iterativum wird ebenfalls durch die Zusammensetzung mit Präposition an sich perfektiv; eine solche Zusammensetzung drückt also an sich die einzelnen Akte der Wiederholung als zeitlich zusammenhängend vorgestellt werden, so erscheint die aus den einzelnen Akten bestehende Gesamthandlung als durativ. Auf dieser Grundlage ist eine Weiterentwicklung erfolgt. Die iterative Form der mit Präpositionen zusammengesetzten Perfektivverba hat in den allermeisten Fällen die eigentliche Iterativbedeutung verloren und ist nur noch Imperfektivum zu den betreffenden Perfektiva, in seiner Praesensform also Praesens zu dem futurischen Sinn des Perfektivs."

This use of the iteratives was impossible in Germanic, and the perfective present, therefore, sometimes had to express a present action.

In discussing *aktionsart* in Balto-Slavic we must be careful, furthermore, to state in each case which particular language or dialect is under discussion. There are decided differences in this respect between the various languages. For example, Serbian-Croatian does not use the present of a perfective verb in a main clause as a future, but employs a periphrase instead. Again, Lithuanian has a regular future form, and so must be left out of the discussion.[27]

The statements made by Leskien, Delbrück, and Streitberg show that those Balto-Slavic languages which used the present form of a perfective verb to take the place of the lost future rarely used the historical present. When it was used, a preceding preterit indicated the past action. The present form of an iterative verb took the place of the present tense of a perfective verb.

Now, Germanic had no iterative category and did not distinguish so sharply between perfectives and imperfectives. The further

[22] *Gram.*, p. 227.
[23] With the exception, of course, of the new informations in N. H. G.
[24] *Syntax* II, 122 ff.
[25] *P. B. B.* XV, 75-76.
[26] *Altbulg. Handbuch*, 161-62.
[27] For further differences see Vondrak II, 273, and Herbig *I-F.*, 6, 190 ff.

weakening of this distinction caused the present form of both classes of verbs to be used to express both present and future time. The periphrase with a modal auxiliary, which occurs only with imperfectives in Balto-Slavic, was used with both classes of verbs in Germanic. It is significant that each Germanic dialect developed this periphrase into a future tense. Moreover, it is significant that this development in M. H. G. and in M. E. antedated the use of the present form of the verb as a historical present. The study of *aktionsart* in Germanic, then, will explain the origin of the periphrastic future. Behaghel has studied *aktionsart* only in connection with the origin of the historical present. The two tenses must be studied together, and we, therefore, again face the relation of the historical present to the future tense.

It will be well to give a brief summary of the study of *aktionsart* in Old English and in the other Germanic dialects.

We have already discussed Streitberg's treatment of perfectivity in Gothic. His theory works fairly well when applied to Gothic, but not nearly so well when applied to the other Germanic dialects. The weakening of the distinction between perfectives and imperfectives is just what one would expect.

Wustmann[28] in his study of the *Heliand* obtained the following results:[29]

1. The present of a perfective verb did not always express future time.

2. Since there was no periphrastic future in Old Saxon, a Latin future was often changed to a real present, or it was rendered by a present plus an adverb of time, or by a modal auxiliary plus the infinitive.

Hesse[30] studied perfectivity in the Alfredian translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. His results are as follows:

1. Old English is similar to Gothic in regard to the distinction between perfectives and imperfectives.

2. Durative simplicia become perfective by the addition of certain prefixes.

3. Perfective simplicia, however, often take a perfective prefix. Hesse explains the Old English compounds as more intense perfectives

[28] *Verba Perfektiva, namentlich im Heliand.* Leipzig. 1894.

[29] Wustmann disputes Streitberg's statement that a perfective present generally has a future meaning.

[30] *Perfektive und imperfektive Aktionsart im. ae.* Münster dissertation. 1906.

or as analogical formations. There is no distinction between the simple and the compounded perfectives.

4. A few durative verbs never occur with the prefix *ge-*. The meaning of these verbs precluded a perfective meaning.

Lorz[31] examined *Beowulf* in his study of perfectivity in Old English. I give a summary of his results.

(1). Some Old English verbs show traces of original *aktionsarten*.

(2). Most Germanic verbs had taken on the durative idea in pre-Germanic. A few traces of the momentary action (*findan*), or of the terminative (*bringan*), remain.

(3). *ge-* plus an imperfective simplex made the verb perfective. *Ge-* plus an imperfective verb may give the verb the meaning of the local force of the prefix. A perfective verb plus the prefix *ge-* became a perfective or an intensive-perfective.

(4). Some perfective verbs (e. g. *gifan*) never prefix *ge-*.

(5). Some imperfectives never become perfective.

(6). The present of a perfective verb does not always indicate a future action.

We are concerned only with the relation of *aktionsart* to tense, especially to the future tense. I have tried to determine for myself what verbs use the present for the future, whether there is a sharp distinction in this respect between the two classes of verbs, and whether the present form of a perfective verb usually expresses future action. The results are as follows.

(1). In O. E. there are strong traces of the original distinction between perfectives and imperfectives.

(2). Both classes of verbs use the present for the future.

(3). The perfectives more often than the imperfectives employ the present form to denote future action.

We may take *Appolonius of Tyre* as an illustration.

The following verbs use the present for the future: *don* (p. 5, 8) *gebringan* (p. 7), *bringan* (8), *gifan* (pp. 7 and 16), *onfon* (8), *sillan* (9, 10, 22), *geberan* (9), *findan* (12), *geþencan* (12), *gefaran* (12), *becuman* (5), *gemetan* (12), *secgan* (16), *gedon* (16), *gestaþelian* (19), *assendan* (20), *geceosan* (20), *blissigan* (20), *forlaetan* (22). I am unable to determine whether *ofþincan* is perfective or imperfective. If we count it as imperfective, the ratio is: perfectives 15; imperfectives 4 (*don, becuman, blissigan, ofþincan* [?]). Note the number

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[31] *Aktionsart des Verbums im Beowulf.* Wurzburg. 1908.

of compounded perfectives. From the evidence obtained from this study one would conclude that the distinction between the two classes was still strongly felt.

I examined *Beowulf* and collected all present forms with future meaning in this poem. The ratio is: perfectives 24; imperfectives 10. Here the distinction does not seem to be so clear as in *Appolonius of Tyre*. The situation is further complicated by the fact that an adverb or a conjunction of time accompanies the perfectives more often than the imperfectives. The predominance of perfectives in this use, however, is significant.

The perfectives are *niman* (441, 447, 452, 1481, 1491, 1846, 2536), *greotan* (1342), *leanigan* (1380), *gewyrcan* (1491), *forsittan* (1767), *forsworcan* (1767), *gefricgan* (1826, 2889), *bringan* (1829), *gepingan* (1837), *gegangan* (1846), *cwepan* (2041), *onginnan* (2444), *weallan* (2065), *weorpan* (2066), *acwepan* (2046), *wrecan* (2446), *geseon* (2455), *gewitan* (2460), *gesecan* (2515), *losian* (1392, 2062), *geteon* (2526), *drifan* (2808), *sceawian* (3104), *oferswypan* (279). The imperfectives are *herigan* (1833), *swefan* (2060, 2457), *hongian* (2447), *gyman* (2451) *sceacan* (2442), *wisian* (292, 3103), *hatan* (293), *libban* (954, 1224, 2444), *starian* (1485). *Gan* and *beran* may be classed as perfectives or as imperfectives. I am unable to classify *manian* and *myndgian*.

This question may be studied from a slightly different angle. Does the present form of a perfective verb generally express future time? Of the examples cited from *Beowulf* three express real present time: *gehyre* 290, *gehate* 1671, and *oferswypeð* 279 (present ?, or future ?). This evidence strongly supports the statement that the present form of a perfective verb generally expressed future time.

In the *Elene* the present form of the perfective verb occurs as a present and as a future. The ratio is: presents 2; futures 20. With the imperfectives the ratio is: presents 11; futures 14. Here, too, the evidence is strongly in favor of the statement that Old Eng. still kept the Ur-germanic distinction between these two classes of verbs.

We may approach this question from still another angle. In translating the Latin future is any distinction made between perfectives and imperfectives? I examined the first ten chapters of *The Gospel of Saint Matthew* (West Saxon) and collected all occurrences of the Latin future. The future occurs about one hundred times in these chapters. In the translation the present form of a perfective verb is used seventy-five times, the present of an imperfec-

tive thirty-three, a periphrase (as an alternative translation) three times, and the construction is shifted once.[32] These facts point to the conclusion that strong traces of the original distinction between perfectives and imperfectives are to be found in Old English. This distinction, however, was not carried out with perfect consistency, for in some cases both classes of verbs are used to translate the same Latin future, apparently without any difference in meaning.

Since the evidence afforded by a comparison of the Latin original with the Old English equivalent is so valuable, I shall give the cases I have collected from these ten chapters.

	Latin	English	Kind of Verb
I: 21	*pariet*	*gecennes*	P
	vocabis	*geceig* (Imperative)	P
	faciet	*doeð* and *gewyrcas*	I, P
23	*habebit*	*Sceal habba* and *haefis*	I
	pariet	*gecennes*	P
	vocabunt	*geceiges*	P
II: 6	*exiet*	*ofcymes*	P
	reget	*ricses*	I
23	*vocabitur*	*geceiged bið*	P
III: 10	*mittetur*	*bið (sie)·gesended*	P
IV: 6	*tollent*	*genimaes*	P
9	*dabo*	*sello*	P
19	*faciam*	*gedo*	P
V: 5	*posidebunt*	*agnegað*	I
	consolabuntur	*gefroefred bíðon*	P
6	*saturabuntur*	*gefulled bíðon* and *geri-orded*	P
7	*consequentur*	*gefylges*	P
8	*videbunt*	*gesaes*	P
9	*vocabuntur*	*geceiged bíðon* and *genem-ned*	P
11	*persecuti fuerint*	*oehtas*	I
	dixerint	*cwoeðas*	P
13	*evanerit*	*forworðes*	P
	sallietur	*gesalted bið*	P
18	*praeteribit*	*foreade-forgaes*	I, I
19	*solverit*	*untynes, toslittes*	P, P
V: 19	*docuerit* (2)	*laereð*	I
	vocabitur (2)	*bið genemned*	P
	fecerit	*doeð*	I
20	*habundaverit*	*monig fallice* and *monig-falde worðe*	I

[32] In some cases the gloss has two translations for the Latin. This fact will account for the numerical disparity between the Latin futures and the English equivalents.

	intrabis	*ingaes*	P
22	*erit*	*biδ*	I
	irascetur	*uraeδes*	P or I
	dixerit	*cweδas*	P
23	*offeres*	*gebrenges*	P
	fueris	*bist*	I
26	*exies*	*ofgaestu*	P
46	*habebitis*	*sciolun habba*	
47	*salutaveritis*	*beadas-wilcyma*	I, I
VI: 1	*habebitis*	*nabbas*	I
2	*facies*	*doas*	I
4	*reddet*	*forgeldeδ*	I
6	*orabis*	*gebiddes*	I
	reddet	*forgeldeδ*	P
23	*fuerit*	*se and biδ*	I
	erit	*biδ*	I
24	*habebit*	*haefeδ and scile habba*	I
	diligit	*lufaδ*	I
	sustinebit	*hraefneδ*	I
	contemnet	*geteled and forogas*	P
33	*adicientur*	*to-ge-eced biδon*	P
VII: 2	*iudicaberitis*	*doemes*	I
	iudicabimini	*biδan gedoemed*	P
	mensi fueritis	*woegas*	?
	metietur	*gewegen biδ*	P
7	*dabitur*	*gesald biδ*	P
VII: 7	*invenietis*	*infindes, begettas*	P, P
	aperietur	*untyned biδ*	P
	aperietur	*untuned biδ*	P
9	*petierit*	*givias*	P.
	porriget	*raeceδ, seles*	P. P
	porriget	*raeces*	P
	petet	*wilniaδ, givias*	P
11	*dabit*	*geselleδ*	P
19	*exciditur*	*gecorfen biδ, gecearfas*	P, P
20	*cognoscetis*	*ongeatas, oncnawes*	P, P
21	*intrabit*	*ingaas*	P
	intrabit	*ingeonges*	P
22	*dicent*	*g(e)cweada*	P
23	*confitebor*	*ondeto*	I
24	*assimilabitur*	*geliced biδ and geteled*	
		biδ	P
26	*erit*	*biδ*	P
VIII: 7	*veniam*	*cymo*	P
	curabo	*gemo*	P
8	*sanabitur*	*gehaeled biδ*	P
11	*venient*	*cymas*	P

	recumberit	*gehrestas*	I
12	*eicientur*	*biðon gedrifen*	P
	erit	*bið*	P
IX: 19	*sequar*	*fylgo, sohte* (sic)	P
	ieris	*facres, gaes*	I
	eicis	*worpes*	I
IX: 15	*venient*	*cymes*	P
	auferetur	*genummen bið*	P
21	*tetigero*	*hrino*	P
X: 14	*receperit*	*onfoas*	P
X: 14	*audient*	*heres*	I
15	*erit*	*bið*	I
19	*dabitur*	*gesald bið*	P
21	*tradet*	*geseleð*	P
	insurgent	*arrisas*	P
	afficient	*ofslaes*	P
22	*eritis*	*biðon*	I
	perseveraverit	*therh-wunes* and *therh-wunia waella*	P
	erit	*bið*	I
	persequentur	*geoehtas*	P
41	*accipiet*	*onfoes, onfoeð*	P
	accipiet	*onfoes*	P
42	*dederit*	*selles*	P
		sealla waella	
	perdet	*loseð*	P

To summarize briefly our study of perfectivity in Old English, we may say that the present was used as a future for both perfective and imperfective verbs. The present of a perfective more often than the present of an imperfective denoted future action. It would not be safe to say that the present form of a perfective verb generally denoted future action. The lack of an iterative category, as has been shown above, caused the use of the perfective present form as a real present.

The prefix *ge-* was almost the sole formal means of denoting perfectivity in Old English. Naturally, the loss of this prefix in Middle English destroyed any original formal distinction between the class of verbs with *ge-* and those without *ge-*. We still have, of course, imperfective and perfective verbs in English. Compare, strive, struggle: win (get by striving); O. E. winnan: gewinnan. English has lost all formal means of distinguishing between the two classes. Modern German, on the other hand, has formed new perfectives with the prefixes *er-* and *ver-*.

The prefix *ge-*, says Van Draat,[33] was used indiscriminately to a great extent in late Old English.   He gives examples which show that the simplex and the *ge-* compound could exist side by side with little or no difference in meaning.   He adds:[34] "I might extend this list indefinitely, but I think that I have proved that, as early as the tenth century, the prefix, has, with few exceptions, become a meaningless appendage."

Wieck[35] traces the prefix from Old English into Middle English. His citations show that there was a steady and continuous weakening of the perfective force of the prefix.   *Ge->i-* in Middle English, and remained sporadically all through Middle English.   In some cases, Wieck says, the prefix *i-* distinguishes the perfective from the imperfective simplex, but such a distinction is rare.

As I understand *aktionsart* in its relation to tense, formal differences between the various categories of verbal actions could be used to fill up the gaps in the tense system.   Balto-Slavic best illustrates the use of these differences.   Here the present of an iterative is used to express present time of a perfective; the present of a perfective is used to express future time; the present form of an imperfective is used to express present time of an imperfective verb; and, in the case of an imperfective verb, a periphrase is used to express future time.

We have seen that the same state of affairs existed more or less clearly in Gothic.   The absence of a special iterative category, however, caused the present form of a perfective to express both present and future time.   In Old English there are strong traces of this original distinction.   The distinction between the various categories was much weaker than in Gothic, but it was still strong enough to indicate differences in tense.   Naturally, when this distinction grew weaker, greater ambiguity would arise from the use of a present form to express both present and future, and clearer means of expressing futurity in contrast to the present would be demanded.   It is significant that no Germanic language developed a periphrastic future (an unambiguous *future* expression) until after the weakening of this distinction had taken place.   It is also significant that the modal auxiliary plus the infinitive, a combination

[33] *Englische Studien* XXXI, 353 ff.
[34] *Eng. St.* XXXI, 365.
[35] *Das Aussterben des Praefixes ge- im Englischen.*   Darmstadt. 1911.   (Heidelberg dissertation.)

which was already in use (originally perhaps only with imperfectives, as in Balto-Slavic), and which had a strong future connotation, developed into a means of expressing futurity. While in Balto-Slavic this periphrase occurred only with imperfective verbs, in Germanic the periphrase spread to both classes of verbs, probably because of the absence of a special iterative category[36] and the consequent use of the present to express both present and future.

The lack of a special future form is one of the chief differences between the Germanic and the Balto-Slavic verbal systems, on the one hand, and the Greek, the Latin, and the Romance verbal systems, on the other. In the discussion of Germanic tenses this difference should always be kept in mind. The origin of the periphrastic future must be studied in connection with the loss of the distinction between perfectives and imperfectives. Though it will involve repetition of points already discussed, it will be well to quote a few sentences from Blackburn's discussion of this subject.

"In the other Teutonic languages [other than Gothic], this distinction, as a means of expressing the future, had to a great extent disappeared. No doubt the difference was still felt, as it now is, but with the exception of one or two cases, which seem to be survivals of the older usage, and which were used, no doubt, without any consciousness of their origin, there is no sign in any of them that the writers, in their rendering of the Latin future, had any clear sense of the difference between perfective and imperfective action.[37] In Tatian we find *vocabis* rendered by *nemnis* in 2.5 and by *ginemnis* in 3.4, showing that no distinction is made between simple verbs and compounds. The same results follow an examination of the oldest English translations, and in the other languages, as we have seen, the use of the present in a future sense was already on the wane, having been replaced in a great degree by the use of periphrase."

"Whether we should set the date of the beginning of the loss of this distinction between perfective and imperfective verbs as far back as the primitive Teutonic or assign it to each language separately after the division, is not, for our purpose, a matter of importance. It is plain that in the mother-speech the present was the normal way of expressing the future, that along with this the optative was also in use, though only ocasionally, and that a periphrastic form of expression could be resorted to in case of some special ambiguity or of a wish for special exactness in time. The distinction between perfective and imperfective verbs served to prevent the ambiguity in time involved in the double use of the present,

[36] Blackburn, *The English Future*, p. 20.

[37] The use of the present of a perfective verb as a future was no doubt on the wane, but my study of the translations of the Gospels has convinced me that there was at this time a more or less clear distinction between perfective and imperfective verbs.

as long as this distinction lasted; how it may have been avoided in ordinarv cases, after the distinction was lost, will be considered farther on."[38]

Blackburn studied translations from Latin in order to find out how the Latin future was rendered in English. His results may be summarized as follows:

1. The present indicative is generally employed to translate the Latin future.

2. The optative is rarely used.

3. A periphrase with *sculan*, *willan* or *magan* occasionally occurs.

4. Often the construction is changed, or a present tense is substituted for a future without materially altering the tense of the passage.

It seems reasonable to suppose that we must study the historical present in its relation to the periphrastic future. Both tenses must be considered in connection with the difference between perfectives and imperfectives in Germanic, and especially in Old English. Behaghel's theory, therefore, does not contradict the theory that the origin of the historical present is to be explained by a study of the future tense in Germanic.

What, then, is the relation of the historical present to the periphrastic future? We can only theorize about such a problem, but a study of the actual facts will make our theorizing safer and more plausible. The facts are as follows:

The historical present does not occur in O. E. or in O.H.G. In the later stages of these languages there are no examples of the historical present until after the periphrastic future had arisen.[39] This may be a meaningless coincidence, but we cannot dismiss the matter quite so lightly. It seems reasonable to say that the historical present, which indicates past action, could not be used so long as the present form of the verb was used to express general truths (timeless presents), real present actions, and real future actions. Ambiguity or confusion would have arisen. If we argue that the use of a modifying adverb would have made the meaning clear, we shall have to explain why all the Germanic languages did develop a periphrastic future. If this development was not for the sake of clearness, why did each Germanic language separately employ this mode of expressing futurity? It is true that our ancestors did not have

[38] *The English Future*, pp. 20-21.

[39] See Erdmann, *op. cit.*, 99 for the earliest periphrastic future in M. H. G., and Behaghel, *op. cit.*, 202, for the earliest unambiguous historical present.

our strong feeling for tenses; but all speakers at all times must make their meaning clear, and in the easiest possible way.

Or to look at the matter from a different point of view, we may study the perfectives alone. So long as the present form of a perfective verb generally or frequently denoted future action, the present form of such a verb could not be used to express past actions.[40] If we reject this supposition, we shall be forced to explain why the historical present could not have been used with perfective verbs. If it was not avoided for clearness, why was it not used with this class of verbs? There was nothing at any period of the language to prevent this use.[41]

Of the various theories that have been advanced to explain the historical present in English the theory now under discussion, my adaptation of Behgahel's theory to the older theory which studies this phenomenon in connection with the periphrastic future, seems the most plausible. It demands a study of the historical present not as an isolated phenomenon, but in relation to the other English tenses, especially to the periphrastic future. Blackburn points out that the *shall* and *will* future arose in English between 1150 and 1200. If the historical present had developed before the periphrastic future, our theory would have to be rejected. But both in English and in German the origin of the periphrastic future antedates the use of the historical present as a linguistic phenomenon. We have seen also that those Balto-Slavic languages which have a clear form for the future use the historical present with the greatest freedom, and that those languages which had no clear sign for the future and which used the distinction between perfectives, imperfectives, and iteratives to fill up the gaps in the tense system, used the historical present not at all, or only under very restricted circumstances. We have seen that the basis of our theory is not so much the fact that confusion would have arisen through giving one form too many meanings, but rather the fact that the present form of a perfective verb, which generally or often denoted futurity, could not be used to express a

[40] This reason, of course, is different from the reasons given by the advocates of the theory that the periphrastic future had to develop before the historical present could arise. They argue that one form would have been crowded with too many meanings. If the last point I make is correct, this reason alone will explain why no perfective verb at least could employ the present form as a historical present.

[41] In this connection the use of the historical present in those Balto-Slavic languages which have a future form or a future periphrase is very illuminating.

past action. This theory, moreover, has the advantage of explaining both the absence and the conscious avoidance of the historical present in Old English and its appearance in Middle English. This theory renders untenable the theory which explains the absence of this use of the present in Old English as due to a lack of imagination by Old English writers; it renders unnecessary the untenable theory of French influence. And, finally, it explains the same phenomenon in two closely related languages, English and German.

It is impossible to establish any theory with absolute certainty. It is entirely possible that two theories may be right. They may study the problem from different angles. This is the case, I think, with the two theories I have just discussed. The greatest difficulty in deciding upon the merits of the different theories is the fact that the historical present appeared after the development of the periphrastic future in English, after the loss of the distinction between perfectives and imperfectives, and after the Norman Conquest. By choosing any one of these elements and studying it to the exclusion of the others we may build up an elaborate theory. A glance at the various theories enumerated will show that precisely this thing has been done. We are left, therefore, to apply each theory to the facts and to use the facts as a means of testing each theory.

The main purpose of this study has been to collect the facts regarding the historical present in English. The theory was a matter of slighter consequence than the amount of space given to it would indicate. The reader may choose the theory which seems most plausibly to explain the facts. But whatever theory may be chosen, it must explain these facts:

1. The historical present does not occur in Old English.

2. It occurs in the Latin writings of Englishmen of the eighth-eleventh centuries.

3. The historical present is consistently and repeatedly avoided in translating from Latin into Old English.

4. This use of the present appeared in written English at the beginning of the thirteenth century; it became fairly common before the end of the century; and by the end of the fourteenth century was used with the greatest freedom.

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