Twice in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* Bede recounts how Englishmen travelled to Ireland to study Scripture and afterwards returned to teach in their native country. Aldhelm documents the same trend in his *Epistola ad Heahfridum* (hereafter *Epist*), addressed to the unidentified Anglo-Saxon Heahfrid. Heahfrid had just returned from a six-year stay in Ireland, where he studied

> ...not only the grammatical and geometrical arts, including the six neglected grades of the art of physics, but also the more important fourfold mysteries of allegorical and tropological discussion, honeyed in ethereal enigmas of shadowy riddles.

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1. I am grateful to the Dictionary of Old English, University of Toronto, for permission to consult their archive of manuscript microfilms. The Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto, and the Associates of the University awarded research grants enabling me to examine all the *Epist* manuscripts mentioned here *in situ*. Prof. Michael Herren graciously provided me with copies of his published work on Hiberno-Latin versification and offered detailed comments on a draft, now much improved by his erudition.


3. Rudolf Ehwald edited Aldhelm’s *Ad Heahfridum* in his *Aldhelmi Opera*, MGH SS XV (1913-1919), pp. 486-94, where it is entitled *Ad Ehfridum*. Ehwald identified the addressee simply as ‘Ehfridus’, after listing vernacular interpretations of the Latin form. A. S. Cook later corrected the appellation on philological grounds in his ‘Who was the Ehfrid of Aldhelm’s Letter?’, *Speculum* 2 (1927), 363-73 (see my ‘Aldhelm’s Ps and Qs’, in the *Epistola ad Ehfridum*, *Notes and Queries* 234 (1990), 290-93, at 294). I have re-titled the *Epistola* to reflect Cook’s argument.
Aldhelm is thankful for Heahfrið's safe return but wonders whether he should have ventured to Ireland at all. At the conclusion of *Epist*, he impugns Irish learning with an ironic statement aimed at Heahfrið's intellectual loyalties. After all, Heahfrið had snubbed Aldhelm's own teachers, Archbishop Theodore and Abbot Hadrian. 4 Because the letter describes Theodore and Hadrian as active opponents of Irish heterodoxy, it can be dated after Hadrian's arrival in England (670) and before Theodore's death (690). Ehwald's proposed chronology of 686 × 690 rests on his own conjectural dating of Aldhelm's *Carmen de Virginitate*. 5 More speculatively, inferential evidence suggests a date of composition in the 670s, probably after 675/6. 6

While Aldhelm's 'hermeneutic' Latin makes certain sections of *Epist* difficult to read, the conclusion is notoriously baffling. 7 In fact, critics have tried to make sense of it since Charles Du Cange in the *Glossarium Medii et Infimii Latinitatis* (Lyons, 1688). 8 In a volume recognized as a watershed of Aldhelm scholarship, Michael Herren has lately proposed a new interpretation for the obscure ending to *Epist*. 9 Writing in 1979, Herren argued that Aldhelm berates Heahfrið in a rhythmical septinarius at the conclusion: 10

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5. Ehwald, p. 487.
8. I cite throughout from the 1840-50 edition, the most accessible to me. Du Cange used Archbishop James Ussher's *Britanniarum ecclesiastarum antiquitates* (Dublin, 1639) as a source.
10. M. Herren, 'Some New Light on the Life of Virgilius Maro Grammaticus', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 79C, no. 2 (1979), 27-69,
Dignus, fante Glingio,
Gurgo fugax fambulo!

('In the words of Glengus, a fleeing rhetor is worthy of enslavement.')

Although the proposed wording of these lines is undoubtedly inspired, problems of meaning remain. 'If Heahfrith left England to teach elsewhere', Herren argues, 'he would earn the label _gurgo fugax_'.

11 True, the passage embodies a metaphorical adage justifying Aldhelm's earlier criticism of Heahfrith's Irish sympathies. But the _gurgo fugax_ must refer to Aldhelm.

The context of Aldhelm's statement needs to be clarified. Towards the end of _Epist_, Aldhelm likens the Irish to a snarling pack of hounds and hints disapprovingly that Heahfrith might endorse their uncanonical dating of Easter. 12 He then adopts a somewhat conciliatory tone. In a passage layered in irony ('hironia') and deliberately obscured by a rare third-person verb in the passive voice ('cavillabatur'), Aldhelm claims that he spoke rashly: '...sed potius iocistae scurraeque ritu dicacitate temeraria loquentium fraternalae hironia dilectionis obtentu

p. 43. Ehwald's text reads: 'Digna fiat fante Glingio: gurgo fugax fambulo!' (490.1). Herren translated the lines almost identically in 1979: 'a rhetor who flees (i.e. shuns the contest) is worthy of a slave'. I myself have adopted Herren's ingenious hypothesis (Gwara, 'Ps and Qs', p. 291). Herren has recently claimed that the lines could be emended as Michael Winterbottom suggested in his 'Aldhelm's Prose Style', p. 47 note 3: 'Dignu' fiat fante Glingo gurgo fugax fambulo'. The metrical septinarius (trochaic tetrameter catalectic) contrasts with a rhythmical septinarius attested in one of Aldhelm's sources for the letter (cf. 'The Hiberno-Latin Poems in Virgil the Grammarian' in _De Tertullien aux Mozarabes : Mélanges offerts à Jacques Fontaine_, Études Augustiniennes (Paris, 1992), ii, pp. 141-55, at p. 146).


12. 'Et audacter in propatulo contestans pellaci falsitatis frivulo neglecto aequa veritatis censura trutinantae discernam: etiamsi [beatae memoriae] Theodore summi sacerdotii gubernacula regens Hibernensium globo discipulorum, ceu aper truculentus molosorum catasta ringente vallatu, stipetur limato pene citer, grammatico dente iactura dispensidii carens rebelles falanges discutit...' (493.2-6); 'And boldly struggling in the open, having set aside the triviality of deceptive falsity, I will proclaim according to the levelling and equal balance of truth: even if Theodore, holding the office of the high priesthood, were surrounded by a circle of Irish students like a fierce boar encircled by a howling pack of hounds, he would quickly disperse the rebellious phalanxes with the sharpened tooth of grammar and without the detriment of a casualty.'
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cavillabatur' (493.15-16). He then proceeds — superficially, at least — to compromise his stance in a clause that has confounded some Epist readers, past and present: '...si vero quippiam inscitia suppeditante garrula frontose convincitisi pagina prompsisse...' (493.16-17). Revisions by one Anglo-Saxon highlight the potential ambiguities.

Epist exists in six manuscripts, some fragmentary, but all tenth-century or later. Copyists of these books were manifestly puzzled by Aldhelm’s meaning, and certain texts expose divergent traditions at this point:

O, H ... si uero quippiam inscitia subpeditante garrula frontose conuincitur pagina promisisse... (O 99v16 ; H 7r1)
S ...si uero quippiam inscitia[m] subpeditante garrula frontose conuincitur pag<i>na promisisse... (96v13)
R3 ...si uero quippiam inscitia 'moueat' subpeditante garrula frontose conuincitur pagina promisisse... (9r8)
C ...si uero quempiam inscitia moueat subpeditantem garrula frontose conuincitur pagina prorumpente... (7v7)

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13. '...but rather in the manner of jokers and fools speaking with obnoxious chattering was my irony presented under the pretext of fraternal love.'

14. N. Ker, Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon (Oxford, 1957) [=Ker]; H. Gneuss, 'A Preliminary List of Manuscripts Written or Owned in England up to 1100,' Anglo-Saxon England 9 (1981), 1-60 [=Gneuss]; S. Gwara, 'Literary Culture in Late Anglo-Saxon England and the Old English and Latin Glosses to Aldhelm's Prosa de Virginitate' (Diss., Toronto, 1993) [=Gwara]. I use the following sigla, which differ slightly from Ehwald's:

R2 London, Brit. Lib. MS Royal 7 D.xxiv, fols. 82-168: text s.x¹, gll. s. x²; ?Glastonbury, ?Canterbury. [Ker 259 ; Gneuss 473 ; Gwara, pp. 78-102]
S Salisbury, Cath. Lib. MS 38: text, gll. s. xex; Christ Church, Canterbury. [Ker 378 ; Gneuss 707 ; Gwara, pp. 115-23]
R3 London, Brit. Lib. MS Royal 6 A.vi: text s. xex, gll. s. xi¹ ; Christ Church, Canterbury. [Ker 254 ; Gneuss 464 ; Gwara, pp. 133-39]
O Oxford, Bodl. Lib. MS Digby 146: text s. xex, gll. s. x/xi-xi⁰med; ?St. Augustine’s, Canterbury. [Ker 320 ; Gneuss 613 ; Gwara, pp. 103-115]
C London, Brit. Lib. MS Cotton Dom. A.IX, fols. 2-7: text, gll. s. xi¹; Christ Church, Canterbury. [Ker 149 ; Gneuss 329]
H London, Brit. Lib. MS Harley 3013: text, gll. s. xii²; ?Northumbria. [Ker 238 ; Gwara, pp. 153-56]
Because AHRS agree except for the errors inscitiam (no doubt arising through confusion with quippiam) and pagna in S, Ehwald's edition has been universally followed. By contrast, the Domitian manuscript preserves a radical revision which, however inauthentic, makes grammatical sense: 'But if garrulous ignorance should incite anyone [trans. quempiam... moueat] so furnished, he is boldly confuted by the disruptive page, as the versifier says, a fleeing...'. The revised passage sheds little light on the meaning, but it does highlight two questions the redactor tackled: whose 'pagina' engenders Aldhelm's 'hironia', and who or what is the subject of 'co-nuincitur'?

Herren's translation reflects the text's intentional equivocacy: 'If indeed, with the support of prating ignorance, a text can be shamelessly proved to have prompted [my raillery], as the versifier said: 'In the words of Glengus, a fleeing rhetor is worthy of enslavement". Herren's claim that Heahfrīō 'would earn the label gurgo fugax' would therefore have to mean that Glengus supplies the 'shameless text', no doubt his septinarian verses. These lines suggest to Herren that Glengus, endowed with 'prating ignorance', nevertheless justified Aldhelm's rebuke with his outrageous truism.

As if to explain his obstinence, then, Aldhelm cites the difficult lines under discussion: 'Dignus, fante Glingio,/Gurgo fugax fambulo'. This quip bears an ulterior meaning in light of Aldhelm's anti-Irish sentiments because it is a quotation from the Irishman Virgilius Maro Grammaticus's Epistolae:

Ne in illud Glengi incedam, quod cuidam conflictum fugienti dicere fiden- ter ausus est gurgo, inquit, fugax fambulo dignus est, paucâ tibi tui negotii necessaria de pronomine profabor. 16

15. In my view, an antecedent exemplar of C was corrected independently, and R3 has been partially collated with one of these copies or with C.
('Lest I offend Glengus’s maxim, which he dared to speak assertively to someone fleeing a debate (he said that a fleeing gurgo is worthy of fam-bulum), I will mention to you a few things about the pronoun which are necessary for your study."

Since Virgilius elsewhere implies that Glengus was a grammarian or 'rhetor', Glengus’s words are likely addressed to someone fleeing ('fugienti') a debate ('conflictum') rather than a fight. Apparently, Virgilius does not want to merit Glengus’s rebuke ('ne in illud Glengi incedam...') by overlooking some disputed matter on the pronoun. Hence, he will speak up without delay ('profabor'). Virgilius’s quotation fits well in the context of Epist, where Aldhelm would not want to earn similar scorn by failing to point out disputed Irish customs. The remark refers to Aldhelm’s own motives in Epist and not to Heahfrìd’s intent to teach somewhere other than in England. My own translation of the whole passage follows Ehwald’s more closely: 'But even if my text (trans. pagina), aided by blathering ignorance, is proved to have given rise to anything immodestly, as the poet says...'. Hence, Aldhelm offers a disingenuous apology for his crusty rhetoric and refuses to recant his abusive remark. Unfortunately, the literal meaning of Glengus’s statement cannot be gathered from Virgilius or Aldhelm. To be sure, however, much hinges on the sense of Latin gurgo, a neologism of obvious, if ignored, parentage.

Latin gurgo has been inconsistently treated. Relying on a gloss to the text, Du Cange viewed the term as a poet’s name: 'Poeta laudatus ab Aldhelmó'. His source, however, capi-

17. Herren is uncertain whether Glengus was an historical figure; cf. 'Hiberno-Latin Poems', p. 145 and Epitomae I.3 (pp. 5-6) : '...nescio qua auctoritate, nisi forte, ut Glengus tractavit, quem Asperius secutus est...'.

18. 'Dicere voluisse videtur Aldhelmus, paginam suam, si inania proccaciter iactasse convincatur, dignam esse, de qua iudicetur, ut iudicarit de garrulo fugiente Glingius...' (p. 493 note to line 31); 'Aldhelm seems to have wanted to say that his page, if it were convicted of having boasted vauntingly some ridiculous things, it would be judged worthy of that by which Glingius would judge a garrulous fleer...'.

19. Glossarium s.v., where the locus reads: 'Digna fiat fante glinglio (sic) Gurgo fugax fambulo'.

talizes *gurgo* instead of Glingio and reveals the origin of the confusion. Both Niermeyer and Latham take the word as *gurgus*, the former as a masculine noun, the latter as a second declension (substantive?) adjective. Latham bases his meaning on the implicit parallelism of parts of speech between a lemma and a gloss in the Second Amplonian Glossary: 'gurgo i. garrulos'. While Latham queries the sense '(?)garrulus', Niermeyer provides a plausible etymology: 'gurges, gurgus (sens emprunté à 'gordum ' barrage, weir)'. The etymon *gurges* best captures the sense of *gurgo*, and these seemingly conflicting interpretations can be reconciled by reference to Aldhelm's *double entendre*.

Herren recognized the incongruity of the Amplonian gloss *garrulos* and treated *gurgo* as a noun, presumably third declension. His translation 'rhetor' derives from the Amplonian gloss and from his interpretation of Virgilius. Like Herren, the editors of *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* also characterize *gurgo* as a noun (third declension masculine), citing a second occurrence in Virgilius's *Epitomae*: '...quern [versum] frequenter in exprobrationem nostri temporum gurgonum (-gun- *P*) decanto'. Again influenced by the Amplonian gloss, the editors suggest that *gurgo* means 'garrula (subst.)' or 'blatero': 'formatum fort. ex analogia vocis, q. e. gulo significare vid. garrulum, blateronom'. The analogy between *gurgo* and sb. *gula* lacks substantiation.

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23. *TLL* s.v.; '...which verse I frequently declaim in condemnation of these times of ours of *gurgo*'. The morphology of *gurgo* proposed in *TLL* makes excellent sense in Virgilius's context, but requires justification in Aldhelm's. The gender is clearly masculine in Virgilius ('gurgo fambulo dignus est'), but clearly feminine in all manuscripts of *Epist* ('digna fiat gurgo ... fambulo'). Ehwald suggested that *digna* referred to the *pagina*, but I cannot make sense of this reading. To maintain the parallelism in the quotations, Ludwig Traube ('Virgilius Maro Grammaticus', *Hermes* 24 (1889), 647-49), Paul Lejay ('Le grammarien Virgile et les rythmes latins', *Revue de Philologie* 19 (1895), 45-64) and Herren emended the *Epist* reading to *dignus*.
24. *TLL* s.v.
Virgilius’s *Epitomae* citation proves that *gurgo* should be taken as a third declension noun, but the meaning still remains shadowy. Nevertheless, since *gurgo* is an obvious neologism formed on a root *gurg-* plus the Latin termination *-o*, its meaning might be reconstructed from the linguistic root, presumably Latin. Now, *gurges* 'river, torrent, eddy' — a sense which Niermeyer proposed for his interpretation *gurgus* — most closely resembles *gurgo*. If Glengus wished to coin a neologism to equate a person (rhetor) with a torrent, as I believe, this agentive *-o* termination would suit his aims.\(^{25}\) In fact, Michael Herren points out to me that the termination could be 'augmentative' like Naso 'big nose', hence 'big stream'.

The adjective *fugax* supports reading *gurgo* as 'torrent', for in classical and medieval usage, it can describe swiftly flowing water.\(^{26}\) *Fugax* also bears a secondary meaning 'fleeing', and in certain genitive constructions 'shunning' or 'avoiding'.\(^{27}\) Virgilius confects a metaphor, then, by juxtaposing terms with *sensus dupplices*: *gurgo* 'torrent' or 'rhetor' plus *fugax* 'swiftflowing' or 'fleeing'. Hence, in Virgilius’s context, Glengus says, 'a swift-flowing torrent is worthy of *fambulo* or 'a fleeing rhetor is worthy of *fambulo*. The meaning of *fambulo*, again disputed, completes Virgilius’s *bon mot*.

Latin *fambul*(-us ?, -um ?) has been universally treated as an ablative singular noun. In his translation, Herren suggests that *fambulo* is an alternative spelling of *famulo*, interpreted abstractly as 'enslavement'.\(^{28}\) This requires some semantic gymnastics, as Herren concedes, for *famulus* regularly means 'slave'.

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\(^{26}\) Cf. *TLL* s.v.

\(^{27}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{28}\) Winterbottom suggests another, unsupported, reading: 'a runaway boaster deserves a *beating* ('Aldhelm’s Prose Style', p. 47 note 3). Winterbottom presumably reads *vapulum* for *fambulum*. 
or 'servant'. Moreover, the spelling with medial -b- occurs in all manuscripts of *Epist* and in Virgilius's *Epistolae*. If *fambulo* were an alternate spelling of *famulo*, we might expect to see scribal interference. On the contrary, however, Anglo-Saxon readers retained the spelling and thought the term meant 'homecoming'.

Four manuscripts of *Epist* preserve glosses to Aldhelm's ironic conclusion and show (a) that readers did not consider *fambulo* as *famulo* and (b) that they misinterpreted the entire ending:

Fugax gurgo .i. uirgo impetrante nouerca de matrimonio exposita inter feras enutrit a ferarum consuetudinibus assuescens que alio nomine iuturna ; Fante glingio .i. rogante fratre uel alio quolibet amico ut digna fieret illa fugax gurgo fambulo .i. reuersione uel fine laboris.

'A fleeing *gurgo*': that is a virgin, expelled from her marriage at her step-mother's insistence, and reared among wild beasts, eventually adopting the customs of wild beasts, who, by another name, is called 'Iuturna'; 'Glingius says': that is, with her brother or any friend soever asking that that fleeing *gurgo* be worthy of *fambulus* (-um ?), that is a homecoming or end to her labor.

Iuturna surely represents the nymph whose brother Turnus was slain by Aeneas in *Aeneid* XII, but this deduction brings us no closer to understanding the gloss. On the basis of this gibberish, however, we can be confident that native readers of *Epist* had as much trouble as we have with Aldhelm's 'hironia'.

A second interpretation of *fambulo* was offered by Ludwig Traube and repeated by Rudolf Ehwald, on whose edition of Aldhelm Latham based his definition of the term in his *Word-List*. Traube called attention to the term *bambalo*, interpreted ἕλλαστης, in Cassiodorus's *De Orthographia* and Adamantius's (Martyrius) *De B Muta et V Vocali*. Greek ἆλλαστης generally means 'stammerer, murmurer'. It is an apt rendering of the Greek-derived adjective or noun *bambal-* (<βαμβαίνω via βαμβαλόω) 'to chatter' and denotes a comparable notion. In my view, *fambulo* therefore disguises *bambalo*. The spelling *fam-*

29. The glosses are found in C (7v11), O (100r1), H (7r4), R3 (9r12). Both S and R2 are defective at this point.

bulo with initial <f> could represent scribal corruption or Irish pronunciation, in which initial consonant /b/ often lenites to a sound similar to the Modern Greek spirant β. β can be pronounced very much like /v/ and can be spelled with the graph <f> in initial position. Of course, from my perspective the agentic gloss ψελλιστής would imply that bambalo is agentic ('a stammerer') rather than abstract ('stammering', for bambalum). Given the skimpy lexical evidence, this philological issue has to remain vexing. Even so, for literary reasons I shall outline, the suggested sense 'stammering' or 'stammerer' answers better to Aldhelm's plea.

An abstract noun meaning 'babbling' or 'murmuring' would complete the double sense of Glengus's remark. Babbling can describe a swiftly flowing river just as blathering can characterize an individual who abandons his intellectual position. Aldhelm certainly got Virgilius's learned joke, which pivots on a trope of early Irish scholasticism. Indeed, one passage of the more-or-less contemporary Hisperica Famina specifically compares the rhetor to a torrent:

Ceu montosus scropias tranat tollus per macides,  
frondeos fluctuaua eradicat hornos deuoratio, 
inormia euoluit murmure crepita, 
limosam fluminio mactat crepidinem alueo, 
concretas euellit uortice glarias,  
pari ausonicum ex<ś>ubero pululamine fluuium.  

31. R. THURNEYSEN, A Grammar of Old Irish, trans. D. Binchy and O. Bergin (Dublin, 1946 [repr. 1966]), § 29, 122 : 'β (Mod. Ir. bh) was doubtless bila-bial v (neutral and palatal in O.Ir.).'

32. M. HERREN, Hisperica Famina I, I.87-92 : 'As when a mountain stream passes over rocky precipices/ and the devouring flood uproots the leafy ash trees/ and unleashes thundering crashes with a roar/ destroying the mud dam in the river channel/ and bearing away the hardened gravel in its whirlpool/ with equal turbulence do I surpass your Ausonian flood' (and cf I.41-42 as well). The so-called Colloquia Hisperica highlight the same motif: 'Talisne scolaris catera tua in regione uti uidetur, ut sua semper famina roman<Ś>m per facundiam promat, quibus uix ex'il'guus sue etiam li<Ś>n>guus ruulus serpere uidetur ?' (cited from my forthcoming edition, Latin Colloquies from Pre-Conquest Britain, Toronto Medieval Latin Texts, Toronto, 1996, but also available in W. Stevenson, Early Scholastic Colloquies (Oxford, 1929), p. 16).
Herren observes that the same metaphor occurs in the 'Sequel to Crith Gablach', a text of possible eighth-century date, and he adverts to R. A. S. Macalister's brief explanation:

A document of the eighth century enumerates the classes of learned men, two of which are named ansruth 'big river', and sruth do aill 'stream from a cliff' or 'mountain torrent'. The primary idea of the terminology is presumably relative size and importance: but the compiler, or a glossator, of the document explains the latter term as meaning one who drowns everyone small, light, or weak: that washes down loose rocks, and makes them like sea-sand. In this manner does the mountain torrent act: in this manner does the man named after it act — he drowns bad scholars under the tide of his learning and crushes them under the rocks of evidence. Also he is tender to those of little learning, who would ebb away altogether in presence of a 'big river'.

When we give full force to Aldhelm's grammar, therefore, his meaning becomes transparent: he obviously recognizes the Irish scholastic idiom which equates the scholar's speech with a torrent, and he likely repeats an Hiberno-Latin aphorism. After admitting that he had spoken harshly about Irishmen, he continues 'si vero pagina convincitur' in the following clause. The indicative mood expresses certainty, for Aldhelm is guilty of writing frontose. Yet he refuses to capitulate, for even Irish 'authorities' urge him to defend his argument. He would not deserve his reputation as a 'big river' if he failed to tackle Heahfrið's ostensible disloyalties.

By showing that Aldhelm is speaking of himself in the verses 'Dignus, fante Glingio,/Gurgo fugax fambulo', we can show how the lines following his quip amplify his meaning:

Neu timeat scriptor terrentis ludicra linguae!
Sic semper cupiunt scriptorum carpere cartas,
Ut caper hirsutus rodet cum dente racemos;
Nec tamen emedant titubantis gramma poetae. (494.2-5)

('Let the writer not fear the trivialities of the timid tongue!
Thus do they always wish to carp at the compositions of writers
As a shaggy goat chomps the grape-clusters with his tooth;
Yet they do not change a letter of the tipsy poet.')

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Here Aldhelm contends that the writer ought not fear his critics. Rather than consider the poet's sense, they criticize 'like goats gnawing on grape-clusters'. In other words, obnoxious critics eat unfermented grapes and do not drink the strong wine which the tipsy poet ('titubans poeta') has imbibed. These verses are either drawn from, or repeated in, the *Carmen de Virginitate*, lines 2855, 2834, 2845, and 2843 respectively. At the conclusion of the *Carmen* Aldhelm refuses to bow to wagging tongues and invites his readers to address the substance of his work, however misguided it might be, instead of criticizing its style. The critic, he claims, is only a *babbling spectre* (*garrrire*), an expression recalling Glengus's words:

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Neu timeat scriptor terrentis ludicra linguae!
Nam tremulos terret nocturnis larba latebris,
Quae solet in furvis semper garrrire tenebris; (ll. 2855-57)
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('Let the writer not fear the trivialities of the timid tongue!
For a ghoul, accustomed always to babble in the dim shadows,
Only terrifies the fearful in nocturnal recesses.')

Like the conclusion to the *Carmen*, the ending of *Epist* refers to Aldhelm, who challenges Heahfrid to answer his charges. For his own part, Aldhelm will not rescind his criticism. If I may paraphrase: 'But even if my text, aided by blathering ignorance, is proved to have given rise to anything immodestly, as the poet says, 'the babbling brook is worthy of its murmur'.'

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35. On the metaphor of the 'tipsy poet', see the *Colloquia Hisperica*: 'si quis fecerit membri aut lingua titubante[...] loquatur in dirisum...' ('if anyone, feverish in limb or with a tipsy tongue, should speak derisively...', cf. Stevenson, p. 16). Aldhelm again protects himself with an affected confession of drunkenness.