

# kennings

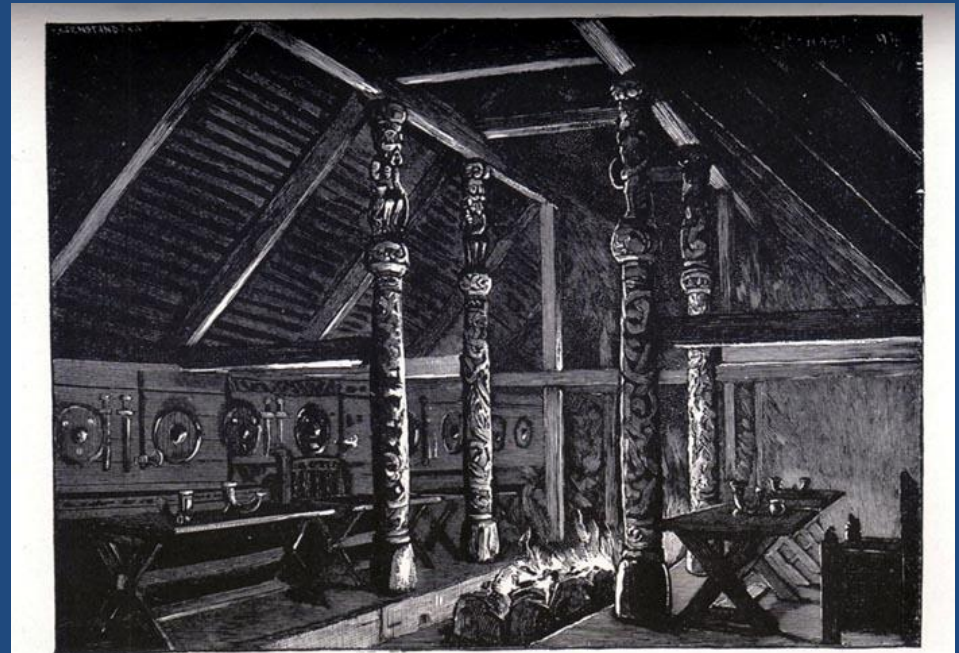
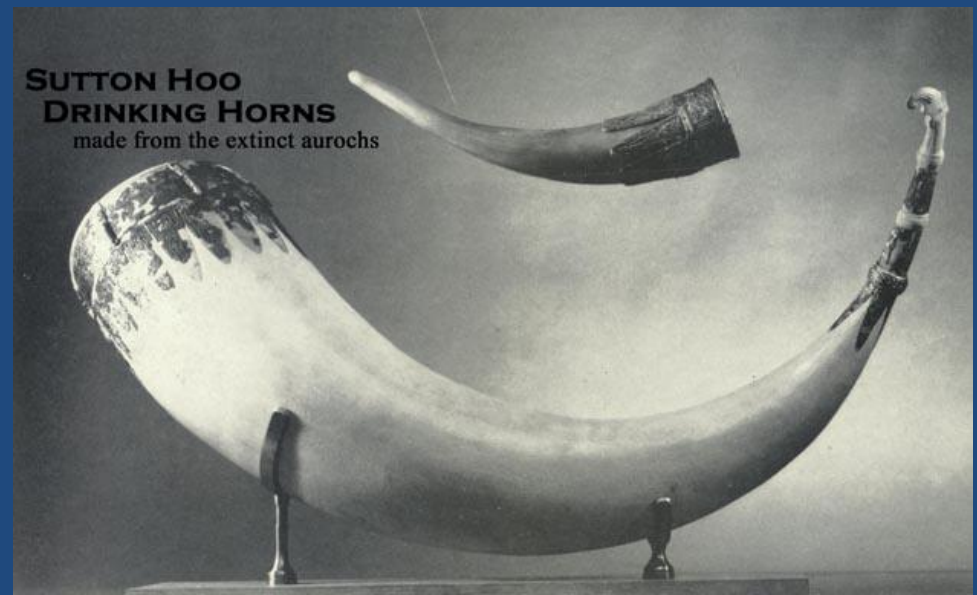
## Anglo-Saxon

## Metaphors

# Defining the Literary Term

- A **kenning** is a special kind of metaphor used in Anglo Saxon poetry.
- It is a compound word or phrase that describes an object or person in terms of something else, but which says something important about the essential nature of the entity.

- The Anglo-Saxons used the kenning *bright sweetness* to describe *mead*.
- With the mead-hall at the center of the Anglo-Saxons incredibly social community, mead was a crucial symbol of fellowship for these people.
- The kenning *bright sweetness* that compares this honey-brewed beverage positively to color and flavor conveys the essential nature of mead for Anglo-Saxons.



Rekonstruierte nordische Halle. Nach Valtyr Gudmundsson, Den islandske Bolig i Fristatstiden.  
 (Aus Olrik, Nordisches Geistesleben. Verlag von Carl Winter, Heidelberg.)

# Types of Kennings

- 1. open compound**  
(*wakeful sleeper* = ghost)
- 2. hyphenated compound**  
(*gold-friend* = king)
- 3. possessive**  
(*grave's embrace* = death)
- 4. prepositional phrase**  
(*Warden of men* = God)



- *arrow aimer*
- *terror of dust*
- *antique printer*
- *tickle-tool*
- *fowl's fashion*

- These kennings all describe a feather—but each conveys a different aspect the entity.
- Think about what each kenning emphasizes about the feather and in what different contexts these kennings might be effectively used.
- Notice also that the last two kennings employ **alliteration** as well.

# Kenning Creation Task

Create a kenning for each of the following nouns that highlight one aspect of the entity's essential nature: *friend*, *parent*, *school*, *tree*. Keep in mind that there are four different types of kennings, and try to create kennings in the different forms.



Friend

**Secret-keeper** is a *hyphenated compound kenning* that describes a friend and highlights the essential quality of trustworthiness. What other kennings can you create to represent the noun friend?



## Tree

**Squirrel's playground** is a *possessive kenning* that describes a tree and highlights its role as an environment for wildlife. **Umbrella of nature** is a *prepositional kenning* that also metaphorically defines a tree and emphasizes its shape and protectiveness. What other kennings can you create to describe a tree?





## Star

**Guider of ships** is a *prepositional kenning* and **heavenly compass** is a *open compound kenning*-- both of which describe a star and its ability to help boats to navigate. What other qualities does a star possess? What kennings can you create to reveal these qualities?

