A Critical Companion to

*Beowulf*
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A Critical Companion to

Beowulf

Andy Orchard

D. S. BREWER
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My debts, intellectual and otherwise, are deep and long-standing, but my academic indebtedness is deepest of all to Michael Lapidge, my some-time supervisor and colleague and now my long-time friend, who I hope will not mind sharing the dedication with a little girl he has known her whole life. I have accumulated many other debts over the years since I first arrived in October 1983 as an awkward undergraduate in the hugely inspiring Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic in Cambridge, not least to Clare, whom I met that very first day and who has since been my (other) constant companion. The teaching I received there, primarily from Michael, but also from Richard North, Oliver Padel, Ray Page, Patrick Sims-Williams, Sverrir Tómasson, and Neil Wright, has stayed with me ever since, and in different ways I am grateful to them all. During my ‘other’ undergraduate career, at Oxford, I was lucky enough to be taught by Ursula Dronke, Malcolm Godden, Bruce Mitchell, and Eric Stanley, and it is an honour to add these honoured names to the list of those I owe. Back at Cambridge, by now teaching in my old undergraduate department, I learned what it was to be an academic from the likes of Lesley Abrams, Paul Bibire, David Dumville, Simon Keynes, Rosalind Love, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, Eric Poppe, and Martin Syrett; and in essence this book derives in no small measure from the team-taught Cambridge Beowulf-seminars I shared then with Michael and Paul, which offered some of the most rewarding and exciting teaching-experiences of my career so far. Likewise, one of the great pleasures of those Cambridge years was sharing an office in Emmanuel College with the late Peter Clemoes, with whom I had long daily conversations, occasionally about Old English: he too taught me much.

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My admiration and gratitude for the map and genealogies so beautifully drawn by Katherine Scarfe Beckett are likewise profound; it is good to see in her map Grendel right at the centre, where he belongs, and to view the world of Beowulf as it is: filled with monsters, mighty-sounding tribes, and artful allusions to Germanic song and story. Likewise, the clear and helpful genealogies are a welcome addition, and provide an indespensable aid to unravelling the sometimes complex family-ties between the poem’s many characters. I am also grateful to Jens Wollesen for his help in preparing the plates, and to Anthony Adams for his assistance with the Indexes.

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Andy Orchard
Toronto
5.i.02
Abbreviations

AB Analecta Bollandiana
ABäG Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik
ABR American Benedictine Review
AIUON Annali, Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli: sezione germanica
AM Annuale Mediaeavale
ANF Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi
ANQ American Notes and Queries
Antiquity Antiquity: a Quarterly Journal of Archaeology
ASnSL Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen
ASE Anglo-Saxon England
ATfS Antikvarisk Tidskrift för Sverige
BGdSL Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur
BJRL Bulletin of the John Rylands Library
BRASE Basic Readings in Anglo-Saxon England
CCSL Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CE College English
CL Comparative Literature
CSASE Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
E&S Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association
EEMF Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile
EETS Early English Text Society
EGS English and Germanic Studies
ELH ELH, or Journal of English Literary History
ELN English Language Notes
ES English Studies
ESC English Studies in Canada
EStn Englische Studien
GR Germanic Review
GRM Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift
ÍF Íslenzk fornrit
JAF Journal of American Folklore
JEGP Journal of English and Germanic Philology
JFI Journal of the Folklore Institute
LSE Leeds Studies in English and Kindred Languages
MÆ Medium Ævum
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Map of Scandinavia in Beowulf’s day
Genealogy I: The Danes, Swedes, Frisians, and Heathobards
Genealogy II: The Geats and Wægmundings
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Beowulf: a brief summary of the plot

Part I: young Beowulf in Denmark (lines 1–2199)

The history of the Danish royal dynasty is traced back to their eponymous founder, Scyld Scefing, whose mysterious arrival and equally mysterious departure are described in detail (lines 1–52); the Scyldings thrive, until Scyld’s great-grandson Hrothgar, crowning a reign of fifty years, builds his magnificent hall, Heorot, and is immediately attacked by a monstrous fen-dwelling exile called Grendel, who preys on the once proud Danes (lines 53–146a). After twelve murderous years, a young warrior from the neighbouring land of the Geats, Beowulf, whose own father had been given help and shelter by Hrothgar, hears of Grendel’s depredations and comes with a small band of Geatish warriors to offer assistance (lines 146b–498). After his fitness for such a task is questioned by Unferth, a leading Dane, Beowulf emphasises his monster-slaying past, and undertakes to take on Grendel alone and unarmed (lines 499–661). Feasting follows, after which both companies of Danes and Geats fall asleep (lines 662–702a). Grendel enters, devours a sleeping Geat, and grabs at Beowulf (lines 702b–749). They wrestle, and in the ensuing struggle the hall is smashed inside; Beowulf’s men attempt to help, but their swords will not bite on Grendel’s hide (lines 750–805a). Grendel attempts to flee, but Beowulf keeps a grip on his arm, tearing it from the socket; Grendel escapes into the night (lines 805b–836). The next day, an assembled band of Danes and Geats marvel at Grendel’s massive claw, and together they follow Grendel’s bloody tracks to the monster-mere, where they see blood on the water, and assume that Grendel is dead (lines 837–63). In high spirits, they gallop home, celebrating Beowulf in song, and comparing him to the mighty dragon-slaying hero Sigemund (lines 864–924); back at Heorot, rich rewards are given (lines 925–1062). The Danes hold a celebration-feast at which the ancient tale of Finn, his wife Hildeburh, and the avenging warrior Hengest is told (lines 1063–1162a). Afterwards Wealthþeow, Hrothgar’s queen, seeks in vain assurances from all parties that recent events will not harm the chances for her own sons to succeed to the Danish throne (lines 1162b–1233a). The rejoicing Danes and Geats fall asleep (lines 1233b–1255a).

Out of the darkness, Grendel’s monstrous mother comes, seeking revenge for her son (lines 1255b–1282a). She snatches a sleeping Dane, one of Hrothgar’s closest colleagues, and escapes into the night (lines 1282b–1309). The next morning, Beowulf, who had been sleeping elsewhere, is informed of the attack, and immediately offers to seek revenge (lines 1310–98). A group of Geats and Danes travel back to the monster-mere, finding the head of the murdered Dane along the way (lines 1399–421); they sit at the edge of the mere, and there kill
one of the monstrous creatures they find (lines 1422–41a). Beowulf accepts the offer of a borrowed sword from Unferth, strips to his mailcoat, and plunges into the mere (lines 1441b–1495a). Tusked monsters try to penetrate his armour, but are thwarted; Grendel’s mother, sensing an intruder, seizes Beowulf and drags him down to the lair she has ruled for fifty years, and where, miraculously, Beowulf finds himself in a waterless illuminated hall (lines 1495b–1512). They fight, but Unferth’s sword will not bite, and things look bleak for Beowulf until, through divine intervention, he is able to get hold of a giant sword hanging on the wall (lines 1513–62). With this weapon he dispatches Grendel’s mother and, seeing Grendel’s body, beheads him too (lines 1563–90). The waiting Danes and Geats see blood appear in the water and fear the worst: the Danes leave, but the Geats stay behind, hoping that their lord has survived (lines 1591–605a). The heat and venom in Grendel’s blood melt the sword-blade like ice, and Beowulf swims back up through the waters of the monster-mere carrying the sword-hilt and Grendel’s head (lines 1605b–1625). The Geats are delighted to see their lord safe, and assist in carrying the booty back to Hrothgar (lines 1626–50), who listens rapt to Beowulf’s account of his adventures as he hands over the spoils (lines 1651–86). Hrothgar ponders the mighty hilt, and praises Beowulf, noting his potential as a king, and issuing a long sermon on the dangers of pride (lines 1687–784); great treasures are given to Beowulf and his men before all retire (lines 1785–1802b). The Geats make their farewells and leave, with the customary exchange of gifts (lines 1803–1903a). Back in the land of the Geats, Beowulf gives a full account to his uncle and king, Hygelac, demonstrating considerable political judgement in his assessment of likely feuds ahead between Hrothgar and his future son-in-law, Ingeld (lines 1903b–2151); once again, gifts are exchanged (lines 2152–99).

Part II: old Beowulf in Geatland (lines 2200–3182)

The story flashes forward more than half a century, and now Beowulf is king. Hygelac had been killed in a rash raid in Francia, and although Beowulf had been offered the crown by Hygelac’s widow, Hygd, he at first turned it down in favour of Hygelac’s young son, Heardred, whom he served loyally until the latter was killed in the latest round of warring between the Geats and their powerful neighbours, the Swedes (lines 2200–8a). After fifty years on the throne, Beowulf learns that the land of the Geats is threatened by a fire-breathing flying dragon, roused to anger by the theft of a cup from its treasure-hoard (lines 2208b–2231a). The history of the hoard is described, abandoned by the last of a lost race, and found by the dragon three hundred years before (lines 2231b–2286). The dragon attacks human dwellings, bent on vengeance (lines 2287–344). The poet reviews the aged Beowulf’s career, as he resolves to face the dragon alone, armed only with his mailcoat, sword, and a specially made iron shield (lines 2345–400). He goes to battle accompanied by eleven retainers, with the thief the thirteenth man, acting as guide (lines 2401–24). Beowulf utters a lengthy final speech before the fight, pondering the sad lot of two other aged kings, namely Hrethel of the Geats and Ongentheow of
the Swedes (lines 2425–537). He summons the dragon from its lair with a loud
shout, and the fight proceeds in three distinct phases, after the first of which his
sword has failed, and by the end of the second of which it has become painfully
clear that Beowulf cannot succeed on his own (lines 2538–601). Beowulf’s men
are too frightened to help, all except Wiglaf, who, as the last of the
Wægmundings, is of his own kin (lines 2602–60). With Wiglaf’s help, Beowulf
kills the dragon with his single-bladed knife, but is mortally wounded in the
process (lines 2661–715a). As Beowulf lays dying, Wiglaf plunders the dragon’s
hoard, and Beowulf, having bequeathed the kingdom to Wiglaf and given
detailed instructions about his own funeral, gazes on the treasure as he dies
(lines 2715b–2820). Wiglaf rebukes the cowards and assumes command
(lines 2821–91). A messenger is sent to relay the sorry news to the rest of the
Geats, and in the process he foretells a fresh wave of warfare from the Swedes
(lines 2892–3027). The Geats travel to see the dead Beowulf and the dragon side
by side, and Wiglaf leads a party of men to plunder the dragon’s cursed hoard
(lines 3028–57). His people bury Beowulf on a headland by the sea, along with
the dragon’s treasure, and (in part at least) according to his own instructions
(lines 3058–168). They sing his praises as the poem ends (lines 3169–82).
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Foreword: Looking Back

A hundred years ago, a reader of Beowulf had access to an impressive array of tools: scholarship on the poem was both vigorous and wide-ranging. Bibliographical guidance and general background were provided by (amongst others) Richard P. Wülcker, Stopford Brooke, and Alois Brandl. The compendious dictionary now known simply as ‘Bosworth–Toller’ had just appeared in its original form, and the last few years of the nineteenth century had seen the publication of not one but two dictionaries of Old English specifically designed for students. Within little more than a decade from the beginning of the twentieth century Albert Cook would publish a concordance to Beowulf, and scholars would have access to a massively revised version of Christian W. M. Grein’s mighty guide to Old English poetic diction, first published half a century earlier. Editions of Beowulf were proliferating, in part in reaction to the eccentric text edited by Ludwig Ettmüller in 1875: a twenty-year period either side of 1900 saw a revision by Adolf Socin of Moritz Heyne’s edition of a quarter of a century before, as well as a new edition by Alfred J. Wyatt, itself later comprehensively revised, and two further texts by Moritz Trautmann and Ferdinand Holthausen.

All this editorial activity was set against the background of the collective editions of Old English prose and verse by Christian W. M. Grein and Richard P. Wülcker. Among a growing range of renderings, Beowulf was translated in

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1 Wülcker, Grundriss zur Geschichte der angelsächsischen Literatur, which appeared in 1885, had an excellent bibliography, while surveys of Old English literature were successively provided by Wülcker, Geschichte der englischen Literatur (1896); Brooke, English Literature from the Beginning to the Norman Conquest (1898); Brandl, ‘Die angelsächsische Literatur’ (1901–9).
2 Bosworth and Toller, An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary. The Dictionary was first published in the years 1881–98, to be followed by a Supplement (1908–21) and Addenda and Corrigenda (1972).
3 Hall, A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary for the Use of Students (published in 1894); Sweet, The Student’s Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon (published in 1897).
4 Cook, A Concordance to Beowulf (published in 1911).
5 Grein, Sprachschatz der angelsächsischen Dichter first appeared in the years 1861–4; a revised edition by Köhler, with the help of Holthausen, appeared in 1912.
6 Wyatt’s edition, simply called Beowulf, first appeared in 1894, and was comprehensively revised (with a much more extensive title) by Chambers in 1914.
7 Trautmann, ed., Das Beowulflied (which appeared in 1904); Holthausen, ed., Beowulf nebst dem Finnsburg-Bruckstück (produced in the years 1905–6).
8 The Grein–Wülcker Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie came out in three volumes from Cassel in the years 1881–98, based on Grein’s two-volume publication from Göttingen (1857–8); the thir-
1895 by a famous artist (in collaboration with an Anglo-Saxon scholar) into verse, and in 1892 and again in 1901 by other noted Anglo-Saxon scholars into prose. Study of the metre of Beowulf had been put on a new footing by the publication in 1893 of Eduard Sievers’ hugely important study of Germanic metre, and if the detailed study of the manuscript-context and scribal transmission of the poem had to wait until after the First World War, Julius Zupitza had already published a widely available manuscript-facsimile of Beowulf itself. Likewise, if a (still less than satisfactory) edition of the prose texts of the Beowulf-manuscript did not appear until 1924, a number of separate editions and discussions of all four other texts in the Beowulf-manuscript (including Judith) had already appeared by 1906.

In late nineteenth-century Germany, a cottage-industry busily collected parallels not only between various Old English poems, but across the whole spectrum of Germanic verse; and fierce debate raged about the precise significance of such parallels, which were argued on the one hand to reflect a common Germanic stock of formulas, and on the other conscious borrowing between poets. Source-study of Beowulf had become a particular focus for enquiry ever since the Icelander Guðbrandur Vigfússon had drawn attention to perceived parallels between Beowulf and Grettis saga in 1878; nor were sources sought

teen–volume Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa came out from Cassel over the period 1872–1933.

9 Morris and Wyatt, trans., The Tale of Beowulf. William Morris undertook an impressive number of artistic and cultural initiatives, and published translations not only of Beowulf, but also of a range of Norse texts, as well as the Odyssey. See further Tilling, ‘William Morris’s Translation of Beowulf’.

10 Earle, trans., The Deeds of Beowulf; Hall, trans., ‘Beowulf’ and the ‘Fight at Finnsburg’. The latter translation was revised by Wrenn, with a fascinating introduction by Tolkien, in 1940.

11 Sievers, Altgermanische Metrik; see too his important ‘Miscellen zur Angelsächsischen Grammatik’, published in 1884.

12 As early as 1876, Eugen Köbling, ‘Zur Béowulf-handschrift’, had published a detailed collation of the manuscript, but most of the detailed discussion of the manuscript took place in successive editions, bar one flare-up in 1890, when a nasty spat developed in a single issue of MLN between Charles Davidson and C. F. McClumpha over ‘Differences between the Scribes of Beowulf’ (the focus was on the use of þ and ð). In this respect, Förster, Die ‘Beowulf’-Handschrift, published in 1919, represents a great leap forward: previous studies are generally very brief, such as Sisam, ‘The Beowulf ms’.


14 Earlier editions of the prose texts include Baskervill, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem’ (1881); Einenkel, ‘Das altenglische Cristorofus-fragment’ (1895); Knappe, Das angelsächsische Prosastück Die Wunder des Ostens (1906). Special mention might be made in this context of Cook’s 1888 edition of Judith, which is a model of its kind.

15 Important stages in the debate in the last two decades of the nineteenth century include Fritzsche, ‘Das angelsächsische Gedicht Andreas und Cynewulf’ (1879); Sarrazin, ‘Beowulf’ und Kynowulf (1886); idem, Beowulf-Studien. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte altgermanischer Sage und Dichtung (1888); Kail, ‘Über die Parallelstellen in der angelsächsichen Poesie’ (1889); Meyer, Die altgermanische Poesie nach ihren formelhaften Elementen beschrieben (1889); Kistenmacher, Die wörtlichen Wiederholungen im Bêowulf (1898). As an index of the influence of this activity in the English-speaking world, see, for example, the publication as early as 1904 of Luehrs, ‘A Summary of Sarrazin’s “Studies in Beowulf”’.

16 See, for example, Vigfusson, ‘Prolegomena’, p. xli, n. 1; Vigfusson and Powell, Corpus Poeticum Boreale; Gering, ‘Der Bêowulf und die isländische Grettissaga’; Boer, ‘Zur Grettissaga’ (all published before 1900).
solely in Norse: other texts in a variety of languages were all being studied for their possible links to *Beowulf*.

Although the whole field of what would now be termed ‘literary criticism’ was at the turn of the nineteenth century still in its infancy, nonetheless questions were being raised about the roles which (for example) the monsters, Christianity, and women played in the poem. If literary criticism is the one central area that has truly blossomed (indeed, some might say overgrown) over the last hundred years, the debt owed by modern scholarship to that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a whole is profound, if often unacknowledged, and it striking to see the extent and range of academic activity centred on *Beowulf* at that time.

*Plus ça change*: a hundred years later, the principal areas of scholarly inquiry into *Beowulf* remain substantially the same, although the sheer number of dedicated publications has become somewhat bemusing. Whereas in 1936 J. R. R. Tolkien could humbly call himself an ‘unworthy successor and beneficiary of Joseph Bosworth’ because on his own admission he had not been ‘a man so diligent in [his] special walk as duly to read all that has been printed on, or touching on, this poem’, it might fairly be said that none of his successors in this ‘special walk’ would now dream of doing so. Indeed, such has been the proliferation of books and articles on *Beowulf* in recent years (with a new item a week appearing on average over the last decade), that simply controlling the secondary material has become a near-impossible task. Happily, however, those reading *Beowulf* have for more than three decades had the advantage of extensive bibliographies published annually in academic journals, as well as a range of other bibliographical tools.

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18 See, for example, Cook, ‘An Irish Parallel to the Beowulf Story’; Klaeber, ‘Aeneis und Beowulf’; Suchier, ‘Über die Sage von Offa und Prytho’.

19 A symptom of the relative newness of the field is the comparative dearth of Festschriften in the area; that for F. J. Furnivall (*An English Miscellany: Presented to Dr Furnivall in Honour of his Seventy-fifth Birthday*) was published in Oxford in 1901, and while it contains eight items relating to Old English, none is directly relevant to the study of *Beowulf*.

20 Important in this context (if now distinctly dated) are Skeat, ‘On the Signification of the Monster Grendel’ (published in 1886); Burton, ‘Woman in Old English Poetry’ (which appeared in 1895); Blackburn, ‘The Christian Coloring in the *Beowulf*’ (published in 1897). Sweringen, ‘Women in the Germanic Hero-Sagas’, is also of relevance here, although it did not appear until 1909, the year which also saw the appearance of Schück, *Studier i Beowulfsagen*.

21 Excellent overviews tracing the development of scholarship over the period are offered by Stanley, *In the Foreground*, pp. 1–68, and (especially) by Haarder and Shippey, ed., *Beowulf: the Critical Heritage*, esp. pp. 77–497, which covers a wide range of views across the nineteenth century.

22 Cf. Robinson, ‘*Beowulf* in the Twentieth Century’.

23 Tolkien, ‘*Beowulf* the Monsters and the Critics’, p. 245; Tolkien is referring to a disparaging comment made about Bosworth himself by Oswald Cockayne.


25 A measure of the sheer volume of scholarship surrounding the poem is perhaps to be gauged by the fact that in 1974 a critical bibliography of translations of the poem (*Tinker, Translations of Beowulf;* now badly in need of updating and revision) could run to some 180 pages.

26 In general, one follows the annual bibliographies published in *ASE* (1972– ) and *OEN* (1967– ), although increasingly the on-line MLA-bibliography (also available on CD-ROM) is of use. Plans are afoot to create an electronic bibliography, based on those in *ASE*, which will make available to individual scholars bibliographical resources at present mostly found in research-libraries.

27 Important in this context are the general bibliography by Greenfield and Robinson (as well as the
Echoing events at the turn of the nineteenth century, the turn of the twentieth saw the production of some fine translations of Beowulf, including one by a Nobel Laureate and another by a noted Anglo-Saxon scholar; at least three new editions appeared in the space of three years (two of them designed for students), and the Beowulf-manuscript itself was finally made available on CD-ROM. Work proceeded steadily on the mighty Toronto Dictionary of Old English, a unique enterprise founded on the whole corpus of surviving texts; the corpus itself was made widely available some time ago. Source-study became an active area of interest during the last decade or so of the twentieth century: two large international projects on the use made of written sources in Anglo-Saxon England came to fruition in parallel, and at the same time attention became increasingly focused on parallels and analogues to Beowulf from a variety of new sources. The last few years have brought a complete revolution in our perception of Anglo-Latin literature, largely through the work of Michael
Lapidge, and it is clear that Anglo-Saxonists of the future will need to be more conversant with (and appreciative of) the Latin literature of Anglo-Saxon England than they have (generally speaking) proved so far.\(^{33}\) Another area in which much work has been done in recent years has been that of Old English metre, with *Beowulf* still basically perceived as a principal focus of enquiry: the proliferation of publications in recent years is striking, to say the least.\(^{34}\) The material culture and the cultural world of the poem have also inspired several studies over the last twenty years or so,\(^{35}\) and at the same time there has been renewed focus on the manuscript, primarily based around questions of the dating of the manuscript and of *Beowulf* itself.\(^{36}\)

Indeed, deep and often bitter disagreements about the date of *Beowulf* can be


said to be one of the constant themes of Beowulf-scholarship from the very beginning, and the twentieth century saw its own share of deep and sometimes acrimonious disputes.\footnote{There is still no consensus on the date of the poem, with current estimates ranging from the seventh century to the eleventh (and indeed every century in between).} Moreover, if the period of composition of the poem remains unresolved, so too have there been recent disagreements about the related question of its provenance: Beowulf has been situated all over England, with suggestions of the place of composition now including Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex, East Anglia, and even Kent.\footnote{If it is no longer fashionable to consider Beowulf to be made up of a collection of individual lays inherited from earlier tradition and pieced together by a compiling poet,\footnote{The profound and continuing effect on Beowulf-scholarship from 1953 on of the so-called ‘oral-formulaic’ theory has ensured that no serious student of the poem} the desire to break the poem down into constituent parts is also seen in such later works as Magoun, “‘Beowulf A’: a Folk-Variant”; idem, ‘Beowulf B: a Folk-Poem on Beowulf’s Death’. But see Brodeur, ‘Beowulf: One Poem or Three?’.


For useful overviews of the dating controversy, see, for example, Liuza, ‘On the Dating of Beowulf’; Müller-Zimmermann, ‘Beowulf: zur Datierungs- und Interpretationsproblematik’; Tristram, ‘What’s the Point of Dating “Beowulf”?’. See, for example, the arguments of Girvan, Beowulf and the Seventh Century (Northumbria); Whitelock, The Audience of ‘Beowulf’ (Mercia); Lapidge, ‘Beowulf, Aldhelm, the Liber Monstrorum and Wessex’; Newton, The Origins of ‘Beowulf’ and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia; Mussett and Wilkinson, Beowulf in Kent.

Among the leading exponents of so-called Liedertheorie were Müllenhoef, ‘Die innere Geschichte des Beowulf’s’; Ettmüller, Engla und Sæxna Scópas and Bóceras; idem, Carmen de Beowulf Gaviarvm regis rebvs; but the desire to break the poem down into constituent parts is also seen in such later works as Magoun, “‘Beowulf A’: a Folk-Variant”; idem, ‘Beowulf B: a Folk-Poem on Beowulf’s Death’. But see Brodeur, ‘Beowulf: One Poem or Three?’.
can be unaware of the extent to which much of the imagery and phrasing of *Beowulf* recurs,\(^{42}\) not only within the poem itself, but in the manuscript, other surviving Old English texts,\(^{43}\) and even surviving works from other Germanic traditions.\(^{44}\) If for some at least the traditional nature of the *Beowulf*-poet’s technique has seemed to undermine the extent of his individual artistry,\(^{45}\) the debate in recent years has at least focused attention on reading the poem primarily as a poem.

At the root of all these wrangles lies the continuing attempt to assess *Beowulf* as a work of literature, a move inspired in large part by Tolkien’s ground-breaking British Academy lecture on ‘*Beowulf*: the Monsters and the Critics’. Perhaps no single paper on *Beowulf* has spawned so many imitators, although Tolkien himself was not without his critics:\(^{46}\) the period after the Second World War saw *Beowulf* increasingly appreciated as a literary masterpiece, with a proliferation of books and articles devoted to its study. Within the last decade or so alone there have been a large number of monographs and volumes of collected essays devoted to the poem,\(^ {47}\) not to mention those collected works of individual scholars or the growing number of *Festschriften* which contain significant discussion of the work.\(^ {48}\) In the evolving debate, *Beowulf* has been

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42 For a partial index, see, for example, Appendixes II and III below.

43 See further below, pp. 163–8.

44 Magoun, ‘The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry’, is the first to apply to Old English in general (and *Beowulf* in particular) the theories of Parry and Lord about the primary importance of repeated formulaic expressions in oral poetry. For the main expressions of the original theory (developed over many years), see, for example, Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse*; Lord, *The Singer of Tales*; *idem*, ‘*Beowulf* and Odysseus’; *idem*, *The Singer Resumes the Tale*. The secondary literature on oral-formulaic theory is vast, and to some extent is best traced through the sensitive and thought-provoking writings of John Miles Foley, whose *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research: an Introduction and Annotated Bibliography* (updated through 1992 on its website: see section C of the Bibliography) remains a most useful tool. Some of Foley’s works of particular relevance to *Beowulf* include ‘Formula and Theme in Old English Poetry’; *The Theory of Oral Composition*; Traditional *Oral Epic; Immanent Art; The Singer of Tales in Performance*; Homer’s *Traditional Art*. Overviews of the theory as applied to Old English are found in Olsen, ‘*Oral-Formulaic Research in Old English Studies: I*’; *idem*, ‘*Oral-Formulaic Research in Old English Studies: II*’; Orchard, ‘*Oral Tradition*’.

45 Perhaps the most compelling defence of the originality and artistry of the *Beowulf*-poet remains Brodeur, *The Art of *Beowulf**. See too his excellent analysis of individual style in ‘A Study of Diction and Style in Three Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poems’. For other views see, for example, Benson, ‘The Originality of *Beowulf*’; Griffith, ‘Convention and Originality in the Old English “Beasts of Battle” Typescene’. An interesting example of how a response to oral-formulaic theory can affect the ways in which an extremely sensitive and thoughtful literary critic approaches the text can be sensed by comparing Irving, *A Reading of *Beowulf*’, with his later *Rereading *Beowulf*, where many of the notions of oral-formulaic theory have been assimilated.

46 Notably Gang, ‘Approaches to *Beowulf*’; Sisam, *The Structure of *Beowulf*’.

47 Good selections of critical essays published within the last ten years or so include Baker, ed., *‘Beowulf’: Basic Readings*; Bjork and Niles, ed., *‘Beowulf’ Handbook*; Fulk, ed., *Interpretations of *Beowulf*’. Earlier selections that are still useful include Fry, ed., *The *Beowulf*-Poet*; Nicholson, ed., *An Anthology of *Beowulf* Criticism*.

on the receiving end of many of the newest developments in critical theory, as
the poem reaches new audiences and benefits from fresh perceptions unimag-
ined by previous generations; a case in point is the growing focus in recent
decades of the roles of women and gender in the poem.

But perhaps the real revolution of the twentieth century was that which
moved the study and appreciation of Beowulf irreversibly away from being
bound by the printed word on the page. Now, one can hear part or all of the
poem read in a great variety of voices, and analyse the poem through a range
of electronic and other media: the challenge for the modern student of Beowulf
is to negotiate the bewildering array not only of books and articles and images
(the traditional paraphernalia of academic criticism), but now of sounds and
bytes and pixels and sound-bites, all competing for the attention of the diligent
student of the text. This book is intended partly as a guide to previous scholar-
ship, and partly (with apologies to future generations) as an incitement to more;
although not all the views expressed here are mainstream ones, it is hoped that
the Bibliography reflects a representative range of opinions, in so far as the
selections of any single scholar are able to conceal an individual’s idiosyncratic
prejudices.

Chapter 2 (‘Manuscript and Text’) considers the sole manuscript containing
Beowulf, and its fate at the hands of successive generations of critics, readers,
and scholars over the past thousand years. After a brief description of the manu-
script’s history since it was first written, attention is drawn to the continuing
controversy surrounding the precise dating of the two scribal hands, as well as to
such debates as to whether, which, and when those other texts now found along-
side Beowulf in the manuscript were ever part of an original compiler’s plan.
The old notion that the manuscript was intended as an English ‘Book of
Monsters’ is discussed, and particular attention is focused on apparent links
between Beowulf and The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle, the text which (at

Toswell and Tyler. Useful collections of critical essays by a single scholar include Greenfield, Hero
and Exile; Mitchell, On Old English; Robinson, The Tomb of Beowulf; Stanley, A Collection of
Papers.

For an overview, see Lerer, ‘Beowulf and Contemporary Critical Theory’. See too Frantzen, Desire for
Origins, and a number of the papers collected in Frantzen, ed., Speaking Two Languages.

Examples with particular relevance or interest for a reading of Beowulf include Albano, ‘The Role
of Women in Anglo-Saxon Culture’; Alfano, ‘The Issue of Feminine Monstrosity’; Chance, Woman as
Hero in Old English Literature; Damico and Olsen, ed., New Readings on Women in Old English Lit-
erature; Fee, ‘Beag & beagroden’; Fell, Women in Anglo-Saxon England; Hansen, ‘From freolicu
foccwen to geomuru ides’; Haruta, ‘The Women in Beowulf’; Judd, ‘Women before the Conquest’;
Olsen, ‘Women in Beowulf’; idem, ‘Gender Roles’; Overing, Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf;
idem, ‘The Women of Beowulf: a Context for Interpretation’; Strauss, ‘Women’s Words as Weapons:
Speech as Action in The Wife’s Lament’.

A range of recordings is listed in section F of the bibliography. Complete recordings of Beowulf in
Old English (very different in style and speed of delivery) have been made by Kemp Malone and
Trevor Eaton; selections by noted Anglo-Saxon scholars include recordings by Jess Bessinger, Arthur
Brodeur, Neville Coghill, Robert Creed, Norman Davis, Ted Irving, and John Pope. Cf. the review of
Eaton’s recording by Orchard, ‘Unrecoverable Magic’. I also include here the readings in Modern
English by Seamus Heaney and Julian Glover, since both do much to emphasise the dramatic poten-
tial of the piece. Other recordings in Old English are also available on the Web, via the ‘Old English
Pages’ noted in section C of the Bibliography.

For a variety of web-based media relating to the poem, see section C of the Bibliography; see too
present) immediately precedes it. From consideration of the manuscript-context of the poem, the discussion turns to the ways in which the manuscript-text of the poem has been altered by its editors, and also to evidence that the *Beowulf*-manuscript is but the last of an unknowable number of written texts of the poem; it is argued that the scribes themselves often seem to be performing similar functions to those of modern editors, and that close analysis of the errors to which they seem prone (some of which they evidently caught and corrected themselves) can provide a useful index against which conjectural emendations of the past may be measured, and new emendations proposed.

Chapter 3 (‘Style and Structure’) focuses on different patterns of repetition and variation within the poem, and considers the extent to which the *Beowulf*-poet can be regarded as an original artist working within an older and far broader poetic tradition. Repetition within the text at a number of levels of diction is considered: repeated sounds, words, compounds, phrases, and themes are all analysed, and particular attention is paid to the patterns of formulaic repetition that pervade the text. Alongside repetition, the contrasting principle of variation is considered, and the ways in which the poet is able to use changes of pace, metre, and diction, as well as a range of unusual or unexpected juxtapositions to lend texture to his text. A number of examples of punning and *double entendre* are highlighted, and it is argued that the numerous examples of sound- and word-play so freely employed by the *Beowulf*-poet are not simply ornamental, but instead offer strong clues to the ways in which the poet intended the text to be read (or rather heard).

Chapter 4 (‘Myth and Legend’) explores the ways in which the *Beowulf*-poet made use of a number of aspects of the inherited Germanic past, and often seems to have viewed that pre-Christian heritage with deep sympathy, if not favour. Particular focus is given on the one hand to the legendary figures of Scyld Scefing, Sigemund, and Ermanaric, parts of whose tales are embedded in the text, and on the other to a number of episodes from pagan myth to which (perhaps more surprisingly) the *Beowulf*-poet seems consciously to allude. Parallels and analogues from the Germanic tradition (notably from later Old Norse-Icelandic texts) to a range of themes and scenes from *Beowulf* are suggested, and it is argued that if the *Beowulf*-poet often seems to present a different perspective on shared material, he often likewise seems to do so for specific literary purposes of his own. The analysis strongly suggests that the *Beowulf*-poet consciously and creatively shaped and adapted the existing tales and traditions he adopted into his own.

Chapter 5 (‘Religion and Learning’) discusses the ways in which the literate and Latinate world of Christian learning may have influenced the poet, both directly and indirectly. The *Beowulf*-poet’s use of biblical language and imagery is considered, as well as the extent to which some of the themes and ideas in the poem may derive from patristic and hagiographical sources. It is suggested that the *Beowulf*-poet may have drawn on details of the biblical narratives surrounding Old Testament heroes such as David, Samson, Moses, or Judas Maccabaeus in much the same way as he did with regard to figures from Germanic myth and legend, and with much the same literary intent: the better to highlight the virtues of his own hero, Beowulf. Parallels and analogues from the
Classical tradition are briefly described, as well as the poet’s possible debt to the vernacular homiletic tradition; likewise the considerable overlap between the language of *Beowulf* and that of other extant Old English poems with a distinctly Christian or biblical theme (notably *Andreas*, *Genesis A*, and *Exodus*) is analysed; the possibility of direct literary links with such texts is suggested. Other Christian-Latin texts that make use of aspects of the Germanic heroic tradition (such as the *Liber monstrorum* or the *Walthariu*) are also considered for the considerable light they shed on the originality of the *Beowulf*-poet himself.

Chapter 6 (‘Heroes and Villains’) concentrates on the significant *dramatis personae* of the text, and shows the careful sympathy with which many of the minor figures are depicted. The so-called ‘Finn-episode’ is analysed in detail, and its brooding quality is emphasised by comparison with the surviving *Finnsburh fragment*, which depicts some of the same events. The *Beowulf*-poet’s focus on the aftermath of heroic violence, rather than on the violence itself, is highlighted, and it is suggested that in this episode, as elsewhere in the text, *Beowulf* is a poem not so much about action as reaction. Certainly, the particular attention in the episode paid to the reactions of Hildeburh and Hengest to the dilemmas they face as a result of the culture of heroic violence is noteworthy, but the focus throughout the episode (as elsewhere in *Beowulf*) is often more on the victims than the victors, a curious circumstance given the ostensibly celebratory backdrop to the telling of the tale itself. Likewise discussed are the depictions of Grendel and his mother, especially in their battles with *Beowulf*, where again the *Beowulf*-poet is often at pains to present the monsters’ perspectives with the same scrupulous concern as that of the poem’s eponymous hero. It is suggested that just as there is significant blurring of the distinctions between monsters and men and past and present in the poem, so too there are few figures who are painted in purely black-and-white terms.

Chapter 7 (‘Words and Deeds’) directs attention to the major role that speeches, which comprise nearly 40 per cent of *Beowulf*, play within the text. The sheer variety of speech-acts within the poem is explored in detail, as is the highly formalised nature of their phrasing. The extent to which the poet uses speech to define character is assessed, as well as the important structural role that speech-acts play within the narrative: the radically different patterning of speeches in different parts of the poem is underlined. The complex sequence of speeches that punctuate the narration of *Beowulf*’s arrival in Denmark is likewise considered in detail, as are the speeches of *Beowulf* himself, who, it is argued, is a witty as well as wordy speaker. The continual emphasis throughout the text on the difference between words and deeds is underlined, and it is suggested that such a distinction is used to polarise both characters and events in *Beowulf*.

Chapter 8 (‘*Beowulf*: Beyond Criticism?’) considers the way in which the poet often seems to undermine his characters as soon as they are introduced: even *Beowulf* is seen as strictly circumscribed in this way. Mankind, the poet continually reminds us, has no ultimate knowledge of how things will turn out: and different people see the same things in deeply different ways. The explicit criticisms found in *Beowulf*’s opening exchange with Unferth are used as exam-
people to explore other more implicit criticisms of individuals and their viewpoints within the text, and it is suggested that the *Beowulf*-poet, a Christian attempting to assess pre-Christian deeds and times, deliberately and repeatedly offers multiple and varied perspectives on the same event or character in order to highlight the extent to which no final judgments on the glory-days of yore can be offered by even the most disinterested human observer: in the poet’s view, apparently, only God, the final arbiter, can truly deem the truth.

The main chapters, then, though discrete units in themselves, can be seen to be roughly arranged to reflect a range of perspectives on *Beowulf*. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the visual and verbal aspects of the poem; Chapters 4 and 5 on its cultural and literary background; Chapters 6 and 7 on narrative themes and technique; and Chapter 8 argues that the multiplicity of views held by recent readers of the poem is encouraged, indeed demanded, by the text itself. A brief ‘Afterword’ looks forward to future trends in scholarly criticism of *Beowulf*, in so far as they can be determined with any confidence at this distance. An Appendix aimed at helping to locate any line of the poem within the manuscript gives a key to the foliation of *Beowulf*, and is followed by two further Appendices attempting to chart repeated formulas within *Beowulf*; all three Appendices are intended to enable readers to orient themselves within the text. The ‘List of passages cited and discussed’, ‘Index of scholars cited’, and ‘General index’ should likewise assist readers in finding their way around this book.

Like Kenneth Sisam, ‘in a place far from libraries I have often read the text of *Beowulf* for pleasure’; and assuredly there is no better reason, and perhaps no better place. At such times, however, I have often felt the need for a *Companion* to steer me towards subsequent research when time allowed, perhaps to provoke me with its blinkered views, and to assure me that for all of us who read *Beowulf* primarily for pleasure, there remains much work to be done. And that is the book I have tried to write.

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Manuscript and Text

The ‘Beowulf’-manuscript: history, script, and contents

The manuscript that survives today in London as British Library, Cotton, Vitellius A. XV is itself in appearance the ‘ruin’ that the mighty poem to which it is sole witness has sometimes been held to be;¹ certainly, both Beowulf and the manuscript which contains it bear the scars of successive generations.² The extant manuscript is composite, probably assembled by the celebrated Elizabethan antiquary Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (1571–1631), from at least two quite separate codices.³ The manuscript now opens with material in a mid-twelfth-century hand (the so-called Southwick codex, fols. 1–90),⁴ including the sole witness to King Alfred’s version of Augustine’s Soliloquies, and concludes with material in two earlier hands (the so-called Nowell codex, fols. 91[94]–206[209]);⁵ it is this second codex (named from an inscription on its title-page at the head of its first leaf which identifies Laurence Nowell (c. 1510/20–c. 1571) as its owner) which is usually called the Beowulf-manuscript.⁶

Although the combined manuscript apparently passed into the possession of the British Museum soon after its foundation in 1753, it had by then already suffered greatly, most seriously in the calamitous fire that swept through the Cotton collection on Saturday, October 23, 1731, damaging or destroying around 200 items when they were stored in the ominously named Ashburnham House. A contemporary account describes how some of the manuscripts were

¹ Compare the words of the Danish translator Adolf Hansen: ‘som vi nu have Digtet, er det som en Ruin’ (‘as we now have the poem, it is like a ruin’), writing a century ago in Clausen, ed., Illustreret Verdens-Litteraturhistorie, III, p. 11, quoted by Haarder, Beowulf: the Appeal of a Poem, p. 89.
² For a brief account of the Beowulf-manuscript, see Donald Scragg, BEASE, pp. 62–3. A number of facsimiles have been produced by Zupitza, Malone, and Kiernan (see section C of the Bibliography).
³ For a brief account of Cotton, see James P. Carley, BEASE, p. 124.
⁴ For speculation about the interval, see, for example Smith, ‘The Provenance of the Beowulf-Manuscript’.
⁵ Apart from the careful description in Malone’s facsimile, see in particular the detailed accounts by Boyle, ‘The Nowell Codex and the Poem of Beowulf’; Gerritsen, ‘British Library MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv – a Supplementary Description’. See too Malone, ‘Readings from Folios 94 to 131, Cotton Vitellius A xv’. Following Kiernan, ‘Beowulf’ and the ‘Beowulf’-Manuscript, pp. 71–2 and 81–5, I use the older system of numbering the folios of the Beowulf-manuscript, rather than the so-called ‘new’ foliation, introduced in 1844, which at some points in the discussion I have inserted in square brackets. For the foliation of Beowulf, see Appendix I below, pp. 267–73.
⁶ For a brief account of Nowell, until recently confused with his namesake cousin the Dean of Lichfield, see James P. Carley, BEASE, p. 336.
Plate 1: The *Beowulf*-manuscript, fol. 129r (*Beowulf*, lines 1–21). By permission of the British Library
Plate 2: The *Beowulf*-manuscript, fol. 95r (*Wonders*, sections 13–15). By permission of the British Library
Plate 3: The *Beowulf*-manuscript, fol. 95v (Wonders, sections 15–16). By permission of the British Library
Plate 4: The Beowulf-manuscript, fol. 128v (Letter, section 41). By permission of the British Library
Plate 5: The Beowulf-manuscript, fol. 160r (Beowulf, lines 1352b–1377a).
By permission of the British Library
Plate 6: The *Beowulf*-manuscript, fol. 189A(197)r (*Beowulf*, lines 2655b–2682a). By permission of the British Library
only saved by breaking open the backs of the flaming presses and throwing the books out of the window. The fire destroyed the threads and folds of the gatherings of both the Southwick and Nowell codices, so obscuring their original construction; the leaves are now mounted separately in nineteenth-century paper frames. Although the Beowulf-manuscript escaped the worst ravages of the fire, which left some of the Cotton manuscripts ‘burnt to a crust’, its margins were singed, and many individual letters were lost, later crumbled, or became obscured by the paper frames. In these circumstances, the testimonies of witnesses who saw the manuscript (and indeed the collection) both before and soon after the fire of 1731 take on the highest importance.

Of these, an early and useful account is given by the pioneering palaeographer, Humfrey Wanley (1672–1726), who in 1705 printed transcriptions of lines 1–19 and 53–73 of Beowulf. As well as supplying useful testimony that by this date the Southwick and Nowell codices were bound together (but of clearly different origins), Wanley offers a poignant description of Beowulf as ‘a most noble text written in poetry’ (Tractatus nobilissimus Poetice scriptus).

Important evidence for establishing the text of Beowulf is provided by the two complete transcripts of the poem made at the instigation of the Icelander Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin (1752–1829), since although he did not see the Beowulf-manuscript until it had already been damaged by fire and moved to the British Museum, it is clear that there has been palpable damage since then. In 1787 Thorkelin commissioned a copyist to transcribe the poem, and in 1789 made a second copy himself; he used the two resulting transcriptions, now known as ‘Thorkelin A’ and ‘Thorkelin B’ respectively, to produce his own rather crude first edition of the poem in 1815. The value of these (admittedly often inaccurate) transcripts cannot be overstated: Kevin Kiernan has estimated that between them they restore or help to restore around 2,000 letters of the text lost before the manuscript was rebound in 1845.

The Beowulf-manuscript itself is the work of two scribes, writing quite
distinct styles of Insular minuscule script. David Dumville provides a conveniently succinct summary of their separate styles and stints:16

Scribe A, writing a minuscule characterised especially by extended descendents and ascenders, was responsible for lines 1–1939 (scyran) of Beowulf (fol. 129[132]r–172[175]v3). Scribe B, writing a rather crude, late Square minuscule script, completed the poetic half-line and the poem, lines 1939 (moste)–3182 (fol. 172[175]v–198[201]v). Both scribes were also responsible for writing other texts now contained within the ‘Nowell Codex’ (viz, fol. 91[94]–206[209] of the Cotton volume): scribe A wrote the prose texts; scribe B copied the surviving leaves of the poem Judith. No other specimen of either scribe’s work has ever been discovered; nor have any closely related scribal performances been identified.

Moreover, scribe A, although apparently completing his stint first, writes with a more modern hand than scribe B; Dumville estimates that if the hands were assessed in isolation, hand A would be dated around the beginning of the eleventh century, while that of hand B would be dated to the end of the tenth: the often-quoted dating by Neil Ker to sometime around the turn of the tenth century (‘s. X/XI’) therefore represents something of a compromise.17 Dumville goes on to provide a still more narrow dating-band, stating that: ‘It is in the highest degree unlikely that the Beowulf-manuscript was written later than the death of Æthelred the Unready (1016), or earlier than the mid-point of his reign (which fell in A.D. 997).’18 This suggestion was made in direct response to an argument put forward by Kevin Kiernan that Ker’s dating range permitted an attribution of the writing of the Beowulf-manuscript to the English reign of Cnut (1016–35),19 a late dating which others (notably Johan Gerritsen) had attacked for a variety of reasons.20 More recent attempts by Kiernan to bolster his own arguments have led to spirited rejoinders by both Gerritsen and Dumville: after much heat (and some light), the battle-lines remain essentially where they were before.21

The 3,182 lines of Beowulf are written on both sides of seventy leaves: scribe A wrote the first eighty-seven sides (roughly lines 1–1935a), plus the first three lines of fol. 172v; scribe B completed the last seventeen lines of fol. 172v and wrote the last fifty-two sides (comprising roughly lines 1958–3182).22 During his stint, therefore, scribe A averaged 22.24 lines of verse per page (or about 356

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16 Dumville, ‘Beowulf Come Lately’, p. 50. For examples of scribe A’s hand, see Plates 1–5 above; for scribe B, Plate 6.
17 Ibid., p. 55; Ker, Catalogue, p. 281 (no. 216).
22 See Appendix I below, from which all the data from the following paragraph derive, for details.
lines per quire of sixteen sides), and scribe B 23.58 (or about 377 lines per quire of sixteen sides). The slight difference would seem negligible, were it not for the fact that both scribes dramatically increase the number of verse-lines per side towards the end of their stint, so skewing the average in both cases. For the first sixty-eight sides (fols. 129r–162v, comprising lines 1–1491a), scribe A regularly rules twenty lines per page, and manages an average of only 21.93 lines of verse, but then suddenly rules sixteen sides for twenty-two lines (fols. 163r–170v, comprising lines 1491b–1874a). At his previous rate of progress, one would expect around 350 lines of verse to fit on the next sixteen sides, but in fact the scribe manages 383. By contrast, scribe B, who mostly fits in twenty-one lines per page, and in general uses far more abbreviations than scribe A, nonetheless writes only 340 lines of verse on his first sixteen sides (fols. 173r–180v; lines 1958–2296a). Yet on the last sixteen sides written (fols. 190r–198v), scribe B manages to squeeze in an astonishing 427 (lines 2756–3182). It is hard to avoid the conclusion that both scribes were anxious to complete their stints within a set space, that both altered the density of their writing to include more verses per page in accordance with calculations of how much extra space would be required, and that both were therefore copying from exemplars.

The combination of two scribal hands of apparently differing dates in the same manuscript, although a defining characteristic of the Beowulf-manuscript, is not unique; Ker also assigns to the manuscript of the so-called Blickling Homilies (Princeton, Scheide Library 71) the same compromise date as the Beowulf-manuscript (‘s. X/XI’) since it too exhibits two scribal hands which, if considered separately, would have been assigned different dates. Such an apparent connection between the two manuscripts, combined with the much-discussed textual parallel between St Paul’s description of Hell in Blickling Homily XVI and that of the monster-mere in Beowulf, has encouraged Kiernan to argue that the manuscripts containing Beowulf and the Blickling Homilies came from the same scriptorium, an intriguing suggestion which

23 It is important to note that all the other texts in the Beowulf-manuscript written by scribe A (Life of Christopher, Wonders, and Letter of Alexander) are likewise written with twenty lines per page; the opening page of Beowulf, however, although ruled for twenty lines, in fact contains only nineteen: two lines are occupied by the opening line of capital letters. Boyle, ‘The Nowell Codex’, p. 24, provides a useful summary table.

24 The exceptions are fols. 173r–174r and 176v–178v which contain twenty lines, and the last page of the poem, onto which twenty-two lines are crammed. That twenty lines per page was the norm for scribe B seems confirmed by the fact that the whole of Judith is so written.


26 Again, Judith provides a useful point of comparison for the normal practice of scribe B: the eight extant folios (199r–206v) contain 343 lines of verse on sixteen sides, with the last few lines of the poem added in an early modern hand at the foot of the final folio. Dobbie, ed., Beowulf and Judith, p. xvii, comparing the hands of scribes A and B, notes that ‘the hand of the second scribe is much larger and more regular, with heavy shading of the vertical strokes’.

27 Ker, Catalogue, p. 454 (no. 382); see too the facsimile by Willard, ed., The Blickling Homilies.

Kiernan supports by a detailed comparison of the writing-areas, rulings, and codicological arrangements of the two manuscripts.29

Kiernan’s argument would carry more force were it not for the fact that the Beowulf-manuscript and that containing the Blickling Homilies are not alone in exhibiting more than one scribal hand: at least three further manuscripts not only witness multiple scribal hands, but are dated by Ker to precisely the same period as those containing the Blickling Homilies and Beowulf (‘s. X/XI’): Cambridge, Trinity College R. 5. 22 (717), fols. 72–158; London, British Library, Cotton Julius A. X, fols. 44–175; London, British Library, Cotton Otho B. II + Otho B. X, fols. 61, 63, and 64.30 This kind of combination of scribal hands seems therefore not unusual for the period;31 much more striking is the fact that scribe B of the Beowulf-manuscript appears to take over in mid-line and perhaps even in mid-word, leading Leonard Boyle to the arresting (if unlikely) suggestion concerning scribe A that: ‘[p]erhaps the plain truth is that he had taken ill, and died’.32

But if much ink has been spilt over the combination of scribal hands in the Beowulf-manuscript, and the subsequent implications for dating, so too opinions are divided over the reasons for the inclusion of Beowulf in the manuscript at all. The present contents of the Beowulf-manuscript can be summarised as follows:33

1. *The Passion of Saint Christopher*, incomplete at the beginning (fols. 93[94]r–97[98]r);34
4. Beowulf (fols. 129[132]r–198[201]v);

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30 Ker, Catalogue, pp. 132–3, 205–6, and 222–3 (nos. 87, 161, and 175); Gneuss, Handlist, nos. 180, 338, and 353. I am grateful to David Dumville for pointing me towards these manuscripts.
31 This observation becomes particularly pointed when one realises that Ker only dates a dozen manuscripts (including the three listed here, the Beowulf-manuscript, and that containing the Blickling Homilies) with the notation ‘s. X/XI’: Ker, Catalogue, nos. 15, 87, 161, 175, 184, 216, 220, 231, 240, 334, 364, and 382; Gneuss, Handlist, nos. 11, 180, 338, 353, 360, 399, 403, 421, 436, 640, 879, and 905. See further Cameron, et al., ‘A Reconsideration of the Language of Beowulf’, p. 37.
32 Boyle, ‘The Nowell Codex’, p. 32. Boyle’s rather dramatic view is challenged by Gerritsen, ‘Have with you to Lexington’, p. 16, who notes other examples of the same sudden changes of hands in, for example, London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius D. XI (Ker, Catalogue, pp. 292–8 [no. 222]), a mid-eleventh-century manuscript containing homilies for various saints’ days (the change occurs at 54r2), and London, British Library, Harley 107 (Ker, Catalogue, p. 303 [no. 227]), a mid-eleventh-century manuscript containing, amongst other items, Elfric’s Grammar (the change occurs at 49r2).
As it survives, then, the manuscript therefore contains three prose texts (items 1–3), all written by scribe A, followed by two poems (items 4–5), the writing of which part of Beowulf (from line 1939a on) and all of Judith are the work of scribe B. This is the order of the texts as reported by Wanley in 1705, who also confirms that by that date both Christopher and Judith were in their present incomplete state.38

The original position of Judith within the manuscript has, however, been called into question by Peter Lucas, who argues on the basis of both codicology and language that Judith most likely originally preceded Christopher, with which it shares a number of linguistic features not found in the other texts.39 Although all the texts in the Beowulf-manuscript can be said in some sense to consider pagan (or at least pre-conversion) days of yore, such an arrangement would distinguish those texts which deal with an Old Testament or conversion-period past (Judith and Christopher) from those which describe pre-Christian antiquity (Wonders and the Letter) or pre-Christian Scandinavia (Beowulf). Lucas bolsters his argument that Judith and Christopher belong together by focusing on a linguistic feature of the manuscript as a whole, namely that both scribes occasionally produce io-spellings where one would expect eo.40 As Kenneth Sisam had observed, there are no such io-spellings whatsoever in the nine manuscript pages of Christopher (written by scribe A) or in the sixteen manuscript pages of Judith (written by scribe B), whereas all the other texts have them;41 indeed, in Beowulf itself scribe B shows a particular fondness for io-spellings: in his stint there are 115 such spellings in fifty-three manuscript pages (or roughly 1 every 2.2 pages), as against only eleven in the eighty-seven manuscript pages of scribe A’s stint (roughly 1 every 7.9 pages).42 Such figures seem to indicate that scribe B tended to retain io-spellings, while scribe A tried to eliminate them;43 and this is but one of several differences in the spellings employed by the two scribes of the Beowulf-manuscript.44 As Kenneth Sisam concludes, moreover, such a distribution of io-spellings ‘suggests that both Christopher and Judith were added to a collection characterised by io-spellings’.45 Certainly, other spelling-variants also connect the other three texts: all three have occasional u for medial f, and the Letter and Beowulf share genitive plural endings in -o, all in scribe A’s stint.46

41 According to Sisam, Studies, p. 92, Wonders has two io-spellings in seventeen manuscript pages, and the Letter has sixty-six such spellings in fifty pages.
42 Sisam, Studies, pp. 92–3; see too Lucas, ‘The Place of Judith’, p. 474. The figures derive ultimately from Rypins, Three Old English Texts, p. xix.
43 For some interesting illustrations of how scribe B occasionally corrected his original io-spellings, see Kiernan, Beowulf and the Beowulf-Manuscript, pp. xxvi–xxvii.
44 For a useful list of some such variants, see Griffith, ed., Judith, pp. 11–18. There are many examples in Beowulf: see below, n. 61.
45 Sisam, Studies, p. 68.
46 Sisam, Studies, pp. 64, 85–6, and 94. In the case of both Wonders and the Letter, the putative medial -u- has been copied as -n-: the Letter has hleounige for hleouige (128v2) and Wonders has leone for leoue six times (97v10 and 20, 99r7, 96r2 and 19, and 101v7) [there were probably another two examples at 98r4 and 96v8 that have now disappeared as a result of physical damage to the manuscript].
The ‘Beowulf’-manuscript as a ‘Book of monsters’

There are further indications that the texts in the Beowulf-manuscript were originally composed in different dialects, and at different dates, leading Sisam to conclude that the core-collection of Wonders, the Letter, and Beowulf was put together because of a compiler’s interest in texts about monsters. It is certainly true that while both Wonders and the Letter depict lands far removed in both geography and chronology from those described in Beowulf, there are a number of thematic similarities which link all three texts. Like Beowulf (but more in the manner of a travelogue), Wonders depicts a natural world essentially inimical to men, inhabited by dragons and other man-eating creatures; the land beyond the so-called River Brixontes, for example, is described as follows (sections 13–16):


[Beyond the River Brixontes, east from there, there are people born big and tall, who have feet and shanks twelve feet long, flanks with chests seven feet long. They are of a black colour, and are called Hostes ['enemies']. As certainly as they catch a person they devour him. Then there are on the Brixontes wild animals which are called Lertices. They have donkey’s ears and sheep’s wool and bird’s feet. Then there is another island, south of the Brixontes, on which there are born men without heads who have their eyes and mouth in their chest. They are eight feet tall and eight feet wide. Dragons are born there, who are one hundred and fifty feet long, and are as thick as great stone pillars. Because of the abundance of the dragons, no one can travel easily in that land.]
Such a description of the utter hostility of such monstrous creatures to men essentially accords with what one finds in *Beowulf*; monster-slaying in response to man-killing is man’s natural reaction in both.\(^{51}\) *Wonders* also supplies an analogue for the *Beowulf*-poet’s description that from Grendel’s eyes there shone ‘an unlovely light, most like a flame’ (line 727: *ligge gelicost leoht unfæger*), both in its account of an unnamed island, the eyes of whose inhabitants ‘shine as brightly as if one had lit a great lantern on a dark night’ (section 3: *scinaþ swa leohte swa man micel blacern onæle þeostre nihte*) and in its description of a two-headed serpent the eyes of which ‘shine at night as brightly as lanterns’ (section 5: *scinað nihtes swa leohte swa blacern*). The figure of Alexander the Great, interestingly in his role of monster-slayer, links both *Wonders* (sections 2, 27, and 30) and the *Letter*,\(^{52}\) as does their shared interest in the monstrous *healfhundingas* (*Wonders*, section 7; *Letter*, section 29), the dog-headed race of men to which Saint Christopher is also said to belong.\(^{53}\) Indeed, the juxtaposition of the *Letter* and *Beowulf* in the manuscript has seemed significant to some,\(^{54}\) and Sisam’s arguments concerning the putative original association of the two texts in an earlier manuscript-collection, to which in stages were added *Wonders*, *Christopher*, and *Judith*, surely invite further study of their close thematic links.\(^{55}\)

‘*Beowulf*’ and ‘The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle’: connected texts?

The more explicitly martial and heroic flavour of the *Letter*, when compared to the other prose texts in the *Beowulf*-manuscript, provides an obvious parallel to *Beowulf*, and the Anglo-Saxon author of the *Letter* clearly warms to his theme, often expanding his Latin source in a manner which often tends to shift the focus onto the character of Alexander himself. An example is provided by the way in which the Anglo-Saxon author treats Alexander’s pride in the appearance of his men, which in the Latin is rather simply expressed (section 11):\(^{56}\)

> Et sane miles ita locupletatus erat, ut vix ferre pondus auri posset. Accedebat quoque armorum non parva gravitas, quia omnia ego inluseram laminis. Ita totum agmen me veluti sidere aut fulgore clarum radiantium auro insignibusque sequebatur cum signis et vexillis. Eratque inter varietates spectaculum in conspiciendo talem exercitum, quia ornatu pariter et inter gentes ceteras eminebat. Ego certe respiciens felicitatem meam insigni numero iuventutis immenso afficiebar gaudio.

[And indeed each soldier was so wealthy that he could scarcely carry the mass of gold. In addition there was no small weight of armour, because I had encased everything in metal plates. So the whole army was following me,]

\(^{51}\) For an excellent overview of the theme, see the lavishly illustrated article by Ruggerini, ‘L’eroe germanico contro avversari mostruosi’.

\(^{52}\) Cf. Tristram, ‘Der Insulare Alexander’; *idem*, ‘More Talk of Alexander’.


\(^{54}\) See, for example, Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 116–39.

\(^{55}\) See above, n. 48.

\(^{56}\) For variant texts in the Latin, see, for example, Boer, ed., *Epistola Alexandri*. 
bright like a star or a bolt of lightning, shining with gold and resplendent, with banners and pennants. And it was a sight to see such an army in its different array, since in ornament it was outstanding equally even among other nations. And I, indeed, gazing on my good fortune in the splendid number of young men was touched by great joy.]

The Old English is version is rather longer, and palpably different in tone:

Ond efne swiðe þa mine þegnas 연구 eal min weorod swana gewelgod þæt hie uneðe ealle þa byrðene swers goldes mid him aberan 연구 alædan meahton. Swelce eac heora wæpена noht lytel byrđen swana þor peon eal heora wæpenu þæra minra þegna 연구 ealles mines weoredes 연구 heriges ic [het] hie mid gyldenum þelem bewyercean. Ond eall min weorod swana on þa gelicnesse tungen oððe ligite for þære micelnisse swers goldes. Hit scan 연구 berhte foran swa ymb me uton mid þrymme 연구 herebeacen 연구 segnas beforan me laeddon. Ond swa micel wundor 연구 wæfersien swers þæs mines weoredes on faegernisse ofer ealle ɔpere þeodkynyngas þe in middangearde waerōn. ða sceawede ic seolfa 연구 geseah mine geselinesisse 연구 min wuldor þæfromnisse minre iugúde 연구 geselignisse mines lifes, þæ was ic hwæthwugo in gefean in minum mode ahafen.

[And indeed my thegns and all my troop had gained so much wealth that they could only with difficulty bring and carry with them the burden of all that gold. Also their weapons were no little burden because I had commanded that all the weapons of my thegns and all my troop and army be covered with gold plate. And all my troop looked like stars or lightning because of the amount of the gold. It shone and glittered before me and around me in glory, and they led before me war-banners and standards. And so great was the sight and spectacle of that troop of mine in splendour beyond all the other mighty kings there have been in the world. When I myself gazed and saw my prosperity and my glory and the success of my youth and the prosperity of my life, I was somewhat uplifted with joy in my heart.]

The richness of the diction is best exemplified by the extensive use of (often alliterating) doublets (mine þegnas 연구 eal min weorod; scan 연구 berhte; wundor 연구 wæfersien; sceawede ic seolfa 연구 geseah; mine geselinesisse 연구 min wuldor; þa fromnisse minre iugúde 연구 geselignisse mines lifes);57 the emphasis on Alexander himself is highlighted by a fourfold increase in the use of first-person references, as well as by an alteration of an anonymous reference to other ‘nations’ (gentes), to one to ‘mighty kings’ (þeodkynynga). The use of the latter compound is particularly intriguing, not only since the word occurs no fewer than eight times in Beowulf alone, but also because it is only one of a number of compounds with an evidently heroic and poetic flavour, some shared with Beowulf, that are found in the text of the Letter.58

57 On the style of the Letter in general, see further Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, pp. 132–7.
58 The compound þeodkynynga and its variants is found fifteen times in surviving Old English poetry (Beowulf, lines 2a, 2144a, 2579a, 2694b, 2963a, 2970a, 3008a, and 3086; Death of Edward, line 34b; Fates of the Apostles, line 18b; Genesis, lines 1865a and 1869a; Judgement Day II, line162b; Riddle 67, line 1a; Soul and Body I, line 12b), but, apart from its appearance in the Letter here, only one other time in prose (Napier Homily XXIX: Napier, ed., Wulfstan, p. 138, line 14). Bately, ‘Old English Prose before and during the Reign of Alfred’, p. 113, notes of the Letter ‘a fondness for compounding of a type typical of poetry’. Bately’s list contains five compounds otherwise attested only
Other similarities between the vocabulary of *Beowulf* and the *Letter* are likewise suggestive. So, for example, the verb *sceawian* (‘to gaze upon’, ‘to examine’) is found frequently in both *Beowulf* and the *Letter*, but occurs in none of the other three texts in the *Beowulf*-manuscript. Moreover, the usage of this verb is markedly similar in both cases. The verb *sceawian* occurs no fewer than nineteen times in *Beowulf*, with a strikingly limited set of objects: the things ‘gazed upon’ or ‘examined’ in the poem include Grendel’s trail (lines 132b, 840b, and 843b); the omens consulted by the Geats before Beowulf’s departure (line 204b); Grendel’s hand (line 983b); Grendel’s mother’s trail (line 1391b); the monster-mere (line 1413b); the dead creature from the monster-mere (line 1440b); the hilt from the monster-mere (line 1687b); the plundered cup from the dragon’s hoard (line 2285b); the dragon (line 2402b); the dragon’s hoard (lines 2744a, 2748b, 3075b, 3084b, and 3104b); the treasure from the dragon’s hoard brought to the dying Beowulf (line 2793b); and, indeed, perhaps most strikingly in this context, the dead Beowulf himself (line 3008b and 3032b). As if to underline the monstrous, uncanny, or otherworldly associations of all the objects ‘gazed upon’ or ‘examined’ in the poem, the verb *sceawian* is often found in close proximity to the word *wundor* (‘wonder’, ‘marvel’) and its cognates, which together occur some twenty-three times in the poem: so, for example, after Grendel’s escape from Heorot, many nobles travel great distances ‘to gaze upon the wonder’ of Grendel’s tracks (*wundor sceawian*, line 840b). More startling, perhaps, is the use of the same half-line (*wundur sceawian*, line 3032b) to describe how the tearful Geatish troops ‘gaze upon the wonder’ of their dead king; but the poet has carefully set the scene by having the messenger earlier invite the people to ‘gaze upon’ Beowulf’s corpse (*sceawian*, line 3008b), and, after all, we are told that Beowulf ‘died a wondrous death’ (*wundordeaðe* in poetry, including two compounds shared with *Beowulf*: *byrnwiga* (Letter, section 8; Beowulf, line 2918a; Judith, line 39a; Wanderer, line 94b); *hronfisc* (Letter, section 29; Beowulf, line 540b). Bately also lists three unique compounds from the *Letter*, namely *stanhol* (Letter, section 9), *longscaft* (Letter, section 17), and *godmægen* (Letter, section 31). In general, throughout this book quotations from Old English poems will be taken from ASPR, unless otherwise indicated.

59 I discount here the compound noun *leassceawere*, unique to *Beowulf*, which is found at line 253a, and apparently means ‘spy’.

60 The occurrence of the word *gesceawod* in line 3075b forms part of a notorious crux, but could certainly refer to the dragon’s hoard; the phrase *wundor sceawian* (line 3032b) could equally refer to the dead dragon and/or the dead Beowulf. See further below, pp. 86–7.

61 At lines 771a (*wundor*), 840b (*wundor*), 920a (*searowundor*), 931a (twice: ‘*wunder æfter wundre’*), 995b (*wundorsiona*), 1162a (*wunderfatum*), 1365b (*niðwundor*), 1440a (*wundoric*), 1452b (*wundrum*), 1509b (*wundra*), 1607b (*wundra*), 1681a (*wundormiðh*), 1724b (*wundor*), 1747a (*wunderbebudom*), 2173a (*wundurmaðum*), 2687a (*wundrum* [manuscript wundum]), 2759a (*wundor*), 2768b (*hondwundra*), 3032b (*wundur*), 3062b (*wundur*), and 3103a (*wundur*). One notes in passing the consistent spelling in -*wund*[u]*r* of the B-scribe (after line 1939b), by contrast with the A-scribe.

Likewise in the space of a single line the poet describes how the creature from the monster-mere killed by Beowulf before his descent to fight Grendel’s mother is a ‘wondrous wave-crosser’ (*wundorlic wægebora*, line 1440a), and notes that ‘men gazed upon [it]’ (*weras sceawedon*, line 1440b). Similarly one might note that in two consecutive lines Wiglaf invites the Geatish warriors to ‘gaze upon’ the ‘wonder’ of the dragon’s hoard (lines 3103–4).

63 A further connection between lines 3008b and 3032b is that in each case stress is laid in almost identical terms on the fact that the dead Beowulf had been a great ring-giver (*þe us beagas geaf*, line 3009b; *þone þe him hringas geaf*, line 3034b).
swealt, line 3037b). It is as if in death Beowulf becomes something of a marvel himself. The same verb occurs no fewer than ten times in the *Letter* too, each time describing one of the many wonders Alexander encounters on his travels. In this case, the collocation with the element -wund(o)r-/wunder- is still more striking than in *Beowulf*: all thirteen of the occurrences of the element -wund(o)r-/wunder- are found in close proximity to those of the verb sceawian, as is illustrated in Table I below, which also plots the relevant words in the Latin source-text, in so far as they can be determined.

The particular clustering of such collocated terms at the beginning of the *Letter* underlines the fact that wonders are clearly a major theme of the text, and indeed such collocations occur throughout, right up until the final scenes. What is immediately apparent from the following Table is the fact that, of no fewer than ten sections of the *Letter* which contain either part of the verb sceawian or the element wund(o)r-/wunder-, only two (sections 14 and 25) fail to contain both. That this close collocation of forms is a deliberate strategy on the part of the translator seems confirmed by the wide diversity in the Latin words used in the source-text: of its ten occurrences in the text, the Old English *Letter* exhibits some form of the verb sceawian some six times where either the word translated has no visual connotations or there is no equivalent term in the Latin at all; likewise, of the thirteen occurrences of the element -wund(o)r-/wunder-, less than half translate the equivalent Latin element (-)mir-. Such a shared association of such frequently occurring terms in both *Beowulf* and the *Letter* is the more striking in that not only do *Christopher*, *Wonders*, and *Judith* contain no examples of the verb sceawian at all, but (perhaps more surprisingly) only one each of the form -wund(o)r-; moreover, few other texts in the extant corpus of Old English collocate the same terms with any frequency at all.

There are still other parallels to be perceived between the *Letter* and *Beowulf*, particularly with regard to the monstrous creatures that both Beowulf and Alexander encounter. In the poem, Beowulf is accompanied by Geatish and Danish warriors to the monster-mere, which is set in wilderness not far from the human habitation at Heorot and surrounded by towering trees and cliffs (lines

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64 See further, for example, Robinson, *Tomb of Beowulf*, pp. 3–19.
65 In the following references, section-numbers refer to Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*. Two gatherings of eight leaves (fols. 107–14 and 115–22) have been bound out of sequence, hence the disjunction between the order of folios and section-numbers at this point. I am grateful to Charles Stone for pointing out to me the relative frequency of this verb in the *Letter*.
66 It might be pointed out that in his glossary Rypins only indicates eleven of the thirteen relevant occurrences of the element -wund(o)r-: he omits the two references in 106v19 and 123v8.
67 In sections 9, 25, and 34 there is no direct Latin equivalent for the form of sceawian employed in the *Letter*, while in three other cases the only Latin equivalent involves a verb of motion (section 8, inuasimus ['we invaded']; section 29, adire ['to approach']; section 36, perambulare ['to wander through']).
68 The exceptions are found in sections 1, 11, 25, 26, 29, 34, and 36.
69 *Judith* has wundrum in line 8b, *Christopher* has wundor at 92r10, and *Wonders* has wundrende at 103v10 (section 30); neither of the last two references is noted by Rypins.
70 Many of the examples derive from the gloss /befsceawige wundra/ ['I shall gaze on wonders'] for the Vulgate *considerabo mirabilia* of Psalms 118.18; apart from the translator of the *Letter* and the Beowulf-poet, Wærferth is the only Old English author to use the collocation with any frequency, in his translation of Gregory's *Dialogues*. 
Table I: The distribution of (-)sceaw- and wund(o)r / wunder-forms in The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle

section 3: the earth as a source of wonder
104v10  wundorlicra  prodigia
104v12  wundrienne  mirandum est
104v14  sceawigendum  contemplaris (?)
104v16  wundorlice  –
104v16  sceawigað  intueri

section 8: the marvellous palace of Porus
106r5  wundorlice  mira
106v1  sceawedon  inuasimus (?)
106v11  wundrode  miratus sum
106v19  wunderlice  miri

section 9: the marvellous fertility of Caspia
115r14  wundayrde  ammirarer
115r18  sceawigean  –

section 11: the wondrous spectacle of Alexander’s army
116v12  wundor  spectaculum
116v15  sceawede  respiciens

section 14: the army gets restless
118v7  wundredon  mirabantur

section 25: the camp of King Porus
109v18  gesceawod  –

section 26: wonderful and noteworthy things
110v3  wundorlicra  memorabile
110v3  sceawian  cerneremus

section 29: the wondrous Ictifafonas
112r10  sceawigon  adire
112r19  wunderlices  dignum spectaculum

section 34: the marvellous grove of India
123v6  sceawodon  –
123v8  wundrade  –

section 36: the wondrous trees of the Sun and the Moon
124r14  sceawigan  perambulare
124v3  wunderlicre  –
1048–17a);71 in the Letter, Alexander and his men come across a river in the wilderness when they are beset by thirst (section 12):

Ond þa mid þy þe þæt min werod gehyrted þæt gestilled wæs, þa ferdon we forð þy wege þe we ær ongunnon ða næs long to þon in þem westenne þæt we to sumre ea cwoman. On þære ea ofre stod hread þæt pintreow þæt treowcyn ungemetlicre gyryo þæt micelysse þy clyfe weox þæt wridode.

[And when my troop was heartened and calmed by this, we went ahead on the route we had taken before, and it was not long until we came to a certain river in the wilderness. On the river-bank there stood reeds and pines, and silver-fir trees of huge size and stature grew and flourished on the cliff-edge.]

It is useful to compare the Latin source at this point (section 12):

Quae res cum animaequiorem fecisset exercitum, ceptum iter institui. Nec longe mihi in desertis locis flumen apparuit cuius ripas pedum sexagenum arundo uuestiebat, pinorum abietumque robora uincens grossitudine, qua Indi materia ad constituenda aedificia utebantur.

[After that event had made the army more settled, I continued on the journey we had begun. Not far away in the desert there appeared to me a river, the banks of which were covered by reeds sixty feet high, surpassing in their girth the trunks of pines or silver-firs, and the Indians used that material to construct buildings.]

Apart from the confusion and conflation of tree-types, the Anglo-Saxon author has omitted the anthropological observation on native building-practices, and instead inserted without warrant a reference to a cliff-edge, and an alliterative doublet (weox þ wridode). It is interesting to note that both elements can be paralleled in Beowulf: the cliffs around the monster-mere are mentioned in both descriptions in the poem (lines 1357b–1379 and 1408–17a), while the doublet weox þ wridode occurs only three other times in extant Old English, in Beowulf (line 1741a: weaxeð ond wrideð), Genesis A (line 1532a: weaxað and wridað),72 and Blickling Homily XVI (geweox ond gewridode);73 this last instance is the more intriguing in that the homily in question is precisely that which contains a further parallel for the description of the monster-mere, so suggesting a rather more complex interrelationship between Beowulf, the Letter, and Blickling Homily XVI than has been considered so far.74

In the Letter, Alexander and his men do not have to travel far along this river before they come to human habitation. What happens next again offers suggestive parallels with Beowulf (section 15):

Ferdon we þa forð be þære ea ofre, ða wæs seo eatoðe tid dæges. Þa cwoman we to sumre byrig, seo burh wæs on midre þære ea in anum eglonde

71 Hrothgar tells Beowulf that the monster-mere is close at hand (lines 1361–2: nis þæt feor heonon/ milgemeneces þæt se mere standeð).
72 On the relationship between Genesis A and Beowulf, see further below, pp. 167–8.
74 See above, p. 21, n. 28, and below, pp. 33 and 157–8.
Then we went forth along the bank of the river, at the eighth hour of the day. Then we came to a village, built in the middle of the river on an island. The village was built and constructed from the reeds and trees that grew on the river-bank, and which we have written about and described already. When we looked into the village we saw dwelling in it a few half-naked people. But as soon as they themselves saw us they hid themselves furtively in their houses. I wanted to catch sight of these men, to find out about clean fresh water. After we had waited a long time and none of them would emerge, I ordered a few arrows to be shot into the village, so that if they would not come out to us voluntarily, they should of necessity, through fear of battle. Then they were still more greatly afraid, and hid themselves more securely. Then I ordered two hundred of my thegns from the Greek army to arm themselves with light weapons and go over to the village by swimming, and they swam over across the river to that island. And when they had swum about a quarter of the river, something terrible happened to them. There appeared a multitude of water-monsters, larger and more terrible in appearance than the elephants, who dragged the men through the watery waves down to the river bottom, and tore them to bloody pieces with their mouths, and snatchèd them all away so that none of us knew where any of them had gone. Then I was very angry with my guides, who had led us into such danger. I ordered that one hundred and fifty of them be shoved into the river, and as soon as they were in [the water], the water-monsters were ready, and dragged them away just as they had done with the others, and the water-monsters seethed up in the river as thick as ants, they were so innumerable. Then I ordered the trumpets to be sounded, and the army to head off.]

The Latin source makes it clear that this ‘multitude of water-monsters’ (nicra mengeo) is in fact a herd of hippopotami, whose actions, moreover, are described in rather less dramatic terms (section 15):
hippotami inter profundos aquarum emersi apparuerunt gurgites raptosque in uertice crudeli poena uiros flentibus nobis adsumpserunt.

[hippopotami, that had been emersed in the deep currents of the waters, appeared, snatched the men in their mouths and took them off in a cruel punishment while we wept.]

Some manuscripts have the variant *in uorticem* (‘into the surging water’) for the problematic phrase *in uertice* (literally ‘in the top’, and so perhaps ‘in their mouths’), and such a reading may well lie behind the Old English version, although the sentence as a whole hardly warrants the expansive and gory treatment it receives: there is little but the Anglo-Saxon author’s imagination behind the notion that the ‘multitude of water-monsters . . . dragged the men through the watery waves down to the river bottom, and tore them to bloody pieces with their mouths, and snatched them all away so that none of us knew where any of them had gone’ (*nicra mengeo . . . in done grund þære ea ða yða þæs wæteres þa men besencete ð mid heora muðe hie sliton ð blodgodon ð hie ealle swa fornamon, þæt ure nænig wiste hwær hiora æni cwom*). It is worth noting that in describing the cruel fate of the hapless guides forced into the river the Anglo-Saxon author again makes explicit the fact that the water-monsters ‘dragged them away just as they had the others’ (*gearwe tobrudon hie swa hie þa oðre ær dydon*), while the Latin simply notes that the hippopotami ‘dealt out to them their just deserts’ (*dignos iusta poena affecer*).

But the notion of being dragged down to the depths by water-monsters occurs twice in two parallel incidents in *Beowulf*. The first is described by Beowulf himself in his account of his swimming-match with Breca (lines 549–58):

> ‘Wæs merefixa mod onhrered; þær me wið laðum licsyrce min, heard, hondlocen, helpe gefremede, beadhraegl broden on breostum læg
golde gegenwed. Me to grunde teah fah feondscaða, fæste hæfde grim on grape; hwæþre me gyfeþe wearð þæt ic aglæcan orde gerehte, hildebille; heaþoræs fornam mihtig meredeor þurh mine hand.’

[The spirit of the sea-fishes was stirred up; there my mail-shirt, hard, hand-woven, gave me help against enemies, the braided battle-garment lay on my breast, decorated with gold. A hostile and fiendish attacker dragged me to the bottom, held me firm, grim in its grip; yet it was granted to me that I should pierce the awesome assailant with my point, my battle-blade; the rush of war took off the mighty sea-beast through my hand.]

The conclusion of this episode is echoed a few lines later (lines 574–5a), when Beowulf describes how he despatched some other ‘water-monsters’: ‘yet it was
granted to me that I slew with my sword nine water-monsters’ (Hwæþere me gesælde þæt ic mid sweorde ofsloh / niceras nigene). The second incident in which a mail-clad warrior is dragged down to the depths by a water-monster occurs almost a thousand lines later, but is clearly intended to echo the first; once again Beowulf’s mailshirt saves him, as he is dragged down by Grendel’s mother to her lair at the bottom of the monster-mere (lines 1501–12a):76

Grap þa togeanes, guðrinc gefeng atolan clomnum. No by ær in gescod halan lice; hring utan ymbbearh, þæt heo ðone fyrdhom ðurfhon ne mihte, locene leoðosyrcan laþan fingrum. 1505
Bær þa seo brimwylf, þa heo to botme com, hringa þengel to hofe sinum, swa he ne mihte, no he þæs modig wæs, wæpna gewealdan, ac hine wundra þæs fela swencte on sunde, sædeor monig hildetuxum heresyrcan bræc, ehton aglæcan.

[Then she made a grasp towards him, seized the warrior with her dread claws; yet she did not injure his unharmed body; the rings protected him without, so that she could not penetrate the battle-coat, the linked mail-shirt, with hostile fingers, When she came to the bottom the sea-wolf carried the prince of rings to her home, so that he could not, however brave he was, wield weapons, but a host of strange creatures oppressed him in the swell, many a sea-beast struck his war-shirt with their battle-tusks, pursued the awesome assailant (or ‘awesome assailants pursued [him]’).]

That the author of the Letter should have elaborated two parallel scenes of warriors dragged down to watery depths by monstrous creatures is striking enough, but it may be equally significant that the author should choose the distinctly uncommon word nicor (‘water-monster’) to describe the hippopotami of his source. The word nicor and its variant forms occurs only twelve times in extant Old English, and apart from its four occurrences in the Letter,77 is found five times in Beowulf (lines 422a, 575a, 845b, 1411b, and 1427b) and three times in Blickling Homily XVI,78 once more in precisely the passage which offers a parallel for the description of the monster-mere in Beowulf.79 In none of these other cases is the word used to render a Latin term for ‘hippopotamus’, although the beast was known to at least some Anglo-Saxons:80 in the so-called Cleopatra glossary, the word ipotamus has been rendered by some etymologically-minded Anglo-Saxon as sæhengest (‘sea-horse’).81 It is tempting

76 The manuscript reads brim wyl (line 1506a); þæm (line 1508b: dittography with following modig?); swecte (line 1510a: failure of nasal suspension?).
77 At 119r20 (nicra, misread by Rypins as mera), 119v10 (nicoras) and 12 (nicras), and 111r5 (niccres).
78 Morris, ed., The Blickling Homilies, p. 209, lines 34 and 36, and p. 211, line 5.
79 See above, p. 30.
80 Davis, ‘Hippopotamus’ in Old English’.
81 Stryker, ed., ‘The Latin-Old English Glossary in MS. Cotton Cleopatra A. III’, gloss 3386; the word sæhengest is also found in Andreas, line 488a, as an unremarkable kenning for ‘ship’.
to ascribe both the use of the term *nicor* and the notion that Alexander’s men were dragged down to their deaths to the direct influence of *Beowulf* on the Letter.

Such a notion becomes still more attractive when other parallels are considered. After the incident with the hippopotami, Alexander’s men are directed by the (now subdued) locals to ‘a certain very large lake’ (*sumne swíde micelne mere*), again near human habitation, which is ‘entirely overgrown with trees a mile deep’ (*eall mid wudu beweaxen mile brædo*), and infested with serpents and reptiles of all kinds (sections 16–18); here again the general resemblance to the monster-mere seems striking enough, although in this case all three of the features highlighted here are found in the Latin original, although once more in a less well-developed form. Moreover, later on the Letter, Alexander and his men encounter a terrifying and murderous beast the skin of which seems impervious to their blades (section 27):

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Palus erat sicca et coeno habundans. Per quam cum transire temptaremus, belua noui generis prosiliuit serrato tergo hippotami pectore, duo capita habens, unum leaenae simile, corcodrillo gerens alterum simillimum duris munitum dentibus, quod caput duos milites repentino occidit ictu. Quam ferreis uix umquam comminuimus malleis, quam hastis non ulaluimus transfigere. Admirati autem sumus diei noutatem eius.

[There was a dry marsh, thick with mud, and when we tried to cross it, a beast of a new kind burst forth, with a jagged back, a chest like that of a hippopotamus, with two heads, one like that of a lioness, the second most like a croco-

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82 The mere is described simply as a ‘big lake . . . surrounded by a thick and very ancient wood, and a mile across’ (*ingens . . . stagnum . . . coronatum uetustissima abundantique silua, mille passus tamen patens*); the Anglo-Saxon author has evidently transferred the breadth of the mere to its surrounding forest.
dile, furnished with hard teeth, and that head killed two soldiers with a sudden blow. We scarcely ever weakened it with iron hammers, and we could not pierce it with spears. But we were long amazed at its novelty.]

Here too, notwithstanding the fact that the Anglo-Saxon author appears to have been using a variant text, there are signs of considerable and significant elaboration here. Apart from the usual rash of doublets (adrugad ȝ fen; cannon ȝ hreed; of þæm fenne ȝ of ðæm fæstene; heardum toðum ȝ miclum; geteþed; mid isernum hamerum ȝ slecgum; gefyldon ȝ hit ofbeoton), none of which has any warrant in the original, the author has added more information that emphasises through alliteration both the fact that the creature came ‘out of the fen and fastness’ (of þæm fenne ȝ of ðæm fæstene), and that the creature was impervious not only to spears, but to ‘any kind of weapon’ (ne mid nænige wæpne). Grendel, of course, is said in Beowulf to inhabit the ‘fen and fastness’ (line 104a: fen ond fæsten) in the only other extant example of the phrase; and Grendel too is impervious to ordinary blades, as Beowulf’s men discover when they attempt to help their lord (lines 798–805a):84

Hie ðæt ne wiston, þa hie gewin drugon, 800  
heardhicgende hildemecgas,  
ond on healfa gehwone heawan þohton,  
sawle secan, þone synscaðan  
ænig ofer orþan irena cyst,  
guðbilla nan, gretan noldë,  
ac he sigewæpnum forsworen hæfde,  
ecga gehwylcre. 805  

[They did not know, when they entered the fray, stout-hearted sword-warriors, and thought to hew on every side, to reach the soul, the sinful destroyer, that no war-sword on earth, best of blades, would touch him, but he had bewitched victorious weapons, every blade.]

The tissue of echoes and parallels, both verbal and thematic, that links the Letter and Beowulf is perhaps best explained by the notion that the author of the Letter knew the poem at first hand, and consciously developed hints in his original text in a way which deliberately drew on aspects of Beowulf. Such a possibility is the more intriguing in the light of suggestions by Janet Bately that the Letter was composed in the ninth or early tenth century, and by Kenneth Sisam that if there is evidence that the Letter and Beowulf were associated in the manuscript before Wonders was added to the collection, then other evidence in the Letter itself is ‘against a manuscript association with Beowulf going as far back as the early tenth century’. At what stage any putative influence between the texts might have occurred (not to mention between one or both and Blickling Homily

83 Some variant versions of the Latin text have canna (‘cane’) for coeno (‘mud’) and lunae (‘moon’) for leaenae (‘lioness’); evidently these were the readings seen by the Anglo-Saxon author.
84 For comment on the apparent bewitching of the blades, see Rogers, ‘Beowulf’, line 804’.
86 Sisam, Studies, p. 94.
remains unclear, but undoubtedly the Letter makes a fine companion-piece to Beowulf, and perhaps deserves to be read more widely as such. One final parallel between Beowulf and the text that immediately precedes it in the Beowulf-manuscript may be relevant here. Beowulf ends with the funeral of its hero, and the establishment of a mighty monument to his courage in the form of a burial-mound on a promontory by the sea, according to the wishes of Beowulf himself (lines 2802–8):87

‘Hatað heaðomære hlæw gewyrcean
beorhtne æfter bæle æt brimes nosan;
se scel to gemyndum minum leodum
heah hlifian on Hronesnæsse,
þæt hit sæliðend syððan hatan
Biowulfes biorh, ða ðe brentingas
ofr floda genipu feorran drifað.’

[‘Have those famed in battle construct a burial-mound, bright after the pyre, at the promontory of the flood, which shall tower high on Whale’s Ness as a memorial to my people, so that afterwards seafarers will call it Beowulf’s Barrow, as they drive from afar their tall ships over the mists of the seas.’]

The description of the proposed monument as ‘bright’ (beorhtne) is particularly noteworthy, and has led some to consider what is planned almost as a kind of lighthouse.88 Certainly, the poet’s later description of the building of this barrow again seems to stress its unique quality; at all events, Beowulf’s instructions are seen to have been carried out, and even exceeded (lines 3156–62):89

Geworhton ða Wedra leode
hlæw on hliðe se wæs heah ond brad
wegliðendum wide gesyne
ond betimbredon on tyn dagum
beadurofes becn, bronda lafe
wealle beworhton swa hyt weorðlicost
foresnotre men findan mihton.

[Then the people of the Geats made a burial-mound on the cliff, and it was high and broad and visible from afar to sea-travellers; and in ten days they constructed the beacon of the man brave in battle, surrounded the remnants of the flames with the most splendid wall that the wisest men could devise.]

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87 For a thought-provoking analysis of the circumstances surrounding Beowulf’s funeral and burial, see Robinson, ‘The Tomb of Beowulf’, pp. 3–19.
88 See, for example, Neville, Representations of the Natural World, p. 138.
89 The manuscript is damaged at this point, and the text is problematic; here I follow Mitchell and Robinson, ed., Beowulf, pp. 160–1.
The Geats conclude this solemn construction with a still more solemn ceremony:90 twelve warriors ride around the mound reciting songs of mournful praise, as the poem ends (lines 3169–82).91 As Fred Robinson observes:92

the monuments and ceremony that Beowulf’s survivors provide go far beyond anything he requests in his dying speech. He says nothing about having a splendid wall built around his becn and enshrining his ashes within it; he says nothing about filling the structure with treasure and certainly nothing about ritual chants and processions.

The use of the term becn (‘beacon’) in this passage is the more striking in that it echoes precisely Beowulf’s own use of the word ‘bright’ (beorhtne, line 2803) in his earlier description of the burial-mound; certainly, the two terms are associated elsewhere in the poem in the only other instances of the word be(a)c(e)n: the sun is described as ‘the bright beacon of god’ (beorht beacen godes, line 570a), and a sign from the dragon’s hoard is called ‘brightest of beacons’ (beacna beorhtost, line 2777a). But the notion of a burial-mound full of treasure giving off light is a commonplace of Norse literature,93 and is often a prelude to precisely the kind of gravemound-battle with a dead pagan warrior which in its narrative detail offers so many parallels to the monster-fights in Beowulf itself.94

The heroic concern for a bright and lasting monument that is exhibited by its hero at the end of Beowulf closely echoes that found at the very end of the Latin source for the Letter (section 41), which has Alexander, after hearing a prophecy that he will soon die, giving orders for a similar structure:

Atque in ultima India ultra Liberi et Herculis trophea, quae centum erant, ego quinque mea aurea altiora denis pedibus statui imperau, quae miraculo futura sunt, carissime praeceptor, posteris saeculis non paruo. Nouum perpetuumque statuimus uiritutibus monimentum inuidendum, ut immortalitas esset perpetua et nobis opinio et animi industriae, optime Aristoteles, indicium.

[And in the farthest reaches of India, beyond the monuments of Bacchus and Hercules, which were a hundred [feet tall], I ordered my five golden trophies to be set up, ten feet taller, to be no small wonder, dearest teacher, to coming generations. We have set up to be gazed upon [or ‘envied’] a new and permanent monument to courage, so that there might be for us immortality and esteem forever, and a sign, finest Aristotle, of the exertion of the spirit.]

90 Cf. Rosier, ‘The Two Closings of Beowulf’.
91 Cf. Puhvel, ‘The Ride around Beowulf’s Barrow’.
93 See, for examples, Stitt, ‘Beowulf and the Bear’s Son’, pp. 129–69. Many of these light-giving barrows containing monstrous dead pagans are, like Beowulf’s, specifically described as being situated by the sea; one can therefore make a case that (from a Christian perspective, at least), Beowulf the monster-slayer becomes a monster himself. See further Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, esp. pp. 167–8.
94 See, for example, Stitt, ‘Beowulf and the Bear’s Son; Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, pp. 140–68; Fjalldal, Long Arm of Coincidence. For further discussion of such parallels, see below, pp. 124–5.
A still closer parallel for the construction of sea-side monuments to the courage of a celebrated monster-slayer, moreover, is to be found in the so-called Liber monstrorum (‘Book of monsters’), a text whose apparently close associations with Beowulf have been well-documented. In this case, one of the rare unsourced passages in the text, the hero somewhat ambiguously celebrated is Hercules, the model for Alexander’s own exploits (Liber monstrorum I.12):

Quis Herculis fortitudinem et arma non miretur, qui in occiduis Tyrrheni maris faucibus columnas mirae magnitudinis ad humani generis spectaculum erexit, quique bellorum suorum tropaeae in Oriente iuxta Oceanum Indicum ad posteritatis memoriam construxit, et postquam paene totum orbem cum bellis peragrasset et terram tanto sanguine maculauisset, sese moriturum flammis ad deuorandum inuoluit?

[Who does not admire [or ‘wonder at’] the courage and weaponry of Hercules, who, at the western entrance to the Tyrrenian sea, erected pillars of an amazing size as a spectacle for the human race, and who constructed trophies of his wars in the East by the Indian Ocean, as a memorial for posterity, and afterwards travelled in battles through almost the entire world, and spattered the earth with so much blood, and at the point of death wrapped himself in flames to be consumed?]

Such Classical parallels should not, however, obscure the fact that in Anglo-Saxon England, at least during the earlier period, both kings and saints were customarily laid to rest in prominent mounds by the water’s edge. Still more significant in this context is the way in which the author of the Letter changes utterly the emphasis of the Latin source (section 41, cited above), omitting all classicising references to India, Hercules, or Bacchus, and instead placing the focus squarely back on Alexander, and his own preoccupation with the splendour of his achievements:

Ond me næs se hrædlica ende mines lifes swa miclum weorce swa me wæs þæt ic lēs mærðo gefreme hæfte þonne min willa wære. Daþ ðing ic write to þon, min se leofa magister, þæt þu ærest gefeo in þæm fomscipe mines lifes ðæt eac blissige in þæm weorðmyndum. Ond eac swelece min gemynd stonde þæt hleoige ðoðum eorðcyningum to bysne, ðæt hie witen þy gearwor þæt min þrym ðæt min weorðmynd maran wæron, þonne ealra ofra kyninga þe in middangearde æfre wæron. Finit.

[And to me the swift ending of my life was not so much pain as the fact that I had achieved less glory than I would have wished. I write these things to you, my beloved teacher, that you first can rejoice in the success of my life, and exult in the honours. And also my memory [or ‘memorial’] shall forever stand

95 For details, see, for example, Lapidge, ‘Beowulf, Aldhelm, the Liber Monstrorum and Wessex’; Whitbread, ‘The Liber Monstrorum and Beowulf’; Orchard; Pride and Prodigies, pp. 86–115; idem, ‘The Sources and Meaning of the Liber monstrorum’. See too below, pp. 133–7. The Liber Monstrorum has been edited by, amongst others, Porsia, ed., Liber Monstrorum; Butturff, ‘The Monsters and the Scholar’; Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, pp. 254–320.

96 See further Orchard, ‘The Sources and Meaning of the Liber monstrorum’.

97 Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, pp. 264–7.

and tower as an example for other earthly kings, so that they know the more readily that my power and my honour were greater than those of all the other kings who have ever lived in the world. Finit.]

The Letter finishes part-way down folio 128v, followed by a large blank space; facing it, beginning squarely at the head of folio 129r are the opening lines of Beowulf, itself a glorious monument to secular heroic endeavour. It is surely incumbent on modern scholars to attempt to assess the precise relationship between the two texts, or at least to read them together, as the compiler of the Beowulf-manuscript seems to have intended.100

Editing ‘Beowulf’: from parchment to paper

But if the immediate manuscript-context of Beowulf may perhaps provide valuable clues for how the poem was read and understood around the turn of the eleventh century, when the Beowulf-manuscript was written, the fact that the poem does not survive outside that manuscript has inevitably led to careful sifting of every possible clue to the establishment of a reliable text.101 The chief difficulty lies in ascertaining the extent to which the poem may have been altered in transmission, an essentially insoluble problem which itself hangs on the vexed question of the poem’s date:102 recent voices have argued on the one hand for the existence of some version of Beowulf in written form before around 750,103 and on the other for the Beowulf-manuscript itself being (in part at least) an autograph manuscript of the reign of King Cnut.104 In producing editions of a problematic text using a high proportion of words not found elsewhere in the extant corpus and witnessed in but a single manuscript,105 Beowulf-scholars have been perhaps understandably cautious, and the predominant conservatism of successive editors of the poem has led to the continued acceptance of a whole slew of emendations first proposed by such mighty scholars as John Kemble, Benjamin Thorpe, and N. F. S. Grundtvig during the first half of the nineteenth century.106 But the last decade or so has seen a welcome (if sometimes highly charged) debate on the methodologies to be employed in the textual criticism

99 See Plates 1 and 4 above, pp. 13 and 16.
100 In general, see, for example, Robinson, ‘Old English Literature in its Most Immediate Context’.
101 See, for example, Stevick, ‘Representing the Form of Beowulf’, together with his ‘Graphotactics’ website (details of which are given in section C of the Bibliography).
102 On which vexed question, see above, pp. 5–6.
103 As Lapidge, ‘The Archetype of Beowulf’, p. 41, states: ‘many of the literal errors in the transmitted text of Beowulf can be economically explained by the hypothesis of an early-eighth-century archetype in Anglo-Saxon set minuscule’. Cf. Fulk, A History of Old English Meter, p. 490, who concludes on the basis of a metrical analysis that: ‘Beowulf almost certainly was not composed after ca. 725 if Mercian in origin, or after ca. 825 if Northumbian.’
104 As Kiernan, ‘Beowulf and the Beowulf-Manuscript, p. 278, puts it, the Beowulf-manuscript ‘is the archetype of the epic as we now have it’. Kiernan dates the manuscript itself rather later than most other scholars: see pp. 20–2 above.
105 On these words unique to Beowulf, see further below, pp. 70–1.
106 Kelly, ‘Formative Stages: Part I’ and ‘Formative Stages: Part II’ together offer an indispensable tool for tracing proposed emendations up to 1900. For the editions of Thorpe, Kemble, and Grundtvig, see section D of the Bibliography.
and text-editing of Anglo-Saxon literature in general, with fierce battle-lines drawn between those who, like Eric Stanley, urge caution in abandoning readings preserved by Anglo-Saxon scribes the most incompetent of whose knowledge of Old English surpasses that of any modern critic, and those who, like Michael Lapidge, would encourage sensitive and thoughtful emendation along the lines employed so successfully in the recovery of Classical texts. It is hardly surprising in the context of this ongoing debate that Beowulf has provided a number of juicy bones of contention, with some critics (notably Alfred Bammesberger) suggesting emendations to Beowulf on an almost annual basis, while others (such as Jack Niles and Kevin Kiernan) seek to defend existing manuscript-readings even at the expense of time-honoured editorial interventions that have long been accepted by most readers and translators of the text. Although an evident desideratum of Anglo-Saxon studies is a variorum text of Beowulf which would seek to catalogue and compare all existing editions and conjectural emendations of Beowulf, it is worth noting that despite literally hundreds of proposed emendations scattered through the critical literature, the basic text of the poem has changed little (comparatively speaking) since Kembler's day.

However, it is also important to note that even the most conservative editions of Beowulf have tacitly altered the text in a number of significant ways from what is found in the manuscript: modern lineation, capitalisation, word-division, and punctuation have been introduced, and abbreviations have been expanded, sometimes with unfortunate or downright misleading effect. So, for example,

107 See, for example, a number of books of collected papers dealing with the theme, such as Scrugg and Szarmach, ed., The Editing of Old English; Robinson, ed., The Editing of Old English; Keefer and O'Keeffe, ed., New Approaches to Editing Old English Verse. A useful historical overview is provided by Hall, 'Old English Literature'. See too the thoughtful and thought-provoking comments of Busse, 'Assumptions in the Establishment of Old English Poetic Texts'; idem, Altenglische Literatur und ihre Geschichte; Page, 'Back to the Manuscripts: Some Thoughts on Editing Old English Texts'.

108 See, for example, Stanley, 'Unideal Principles of Editing Old English Verse'.


110 For a representative sample of his work, see, for example, Bammesberger, 'Three Beowulf Notes'; idem, 'A Note on Beowulf 83b'; idem, 'Hidden Glosses in Old English Poetic Texts'; idem, Linguistic Notes on Old English Poetic Texts; idem, 'The Conclusion of Wealththeow's Speech (Beowulf 1231)'; idem, 'Five Beowulf Notes'; idem, 'A Note on Old English gedreag/gedreag'; idem, ' Zu Beowulf 386–394'; idem, 'A Textual Note on Beowulf 431–432'; idem, 'Beowulf's Descent into Grendel's Mere'; idem, 'Beowulf's Last Will'; idem, 'The Emendation of Beowulf, l. 586'; idem, 'The Half-Line freond on freotewum (Beowulf 962a)'; idem, 'The Half-Line Grendelas maegum (Beowulf 2353b)'; idem, 'The Reading of Beowulf, l. 31b'; idem, 'In What Sense was Grendel an angeng(e)or?'; idem, 'Old English reote in Beowulf, line 2457a'; idem, 'The Superlative of OE god in Beowulf'; idem, 'What does he in lines 1392b and 1394b Refer to?'; idem, 'Beowulf's Landing in Denmark'; idem, 'Further Thoughts on Beowulf, line 1537a: Gefeng pa be [f]case'; idem, 'The Syntactic Analysis of Beowulf, lines 4–5'.

See Kiernan, 'Beowulf' and the 'Beowulf' Manuscript, esp. pp. 171–278; Niles, 'Editing Beowulf'.

112 I have in preparation an electronic variorum text of Beowulf, using hypertext, based mainly on the editions listed in the Bibliography below, pp. 328–9.

113 For details, see Malone, ed., The Nowell Codex, pp. 25–6. A case in point is the expansion of the runic symbol .X. (generally expanded as .epel), which appears in Beowulf in lines 520b, 913a, and 1702a (as part of the compound .X. weard). I am grateful to Damian Fleming for pointing out to me the possible significance of the preservation of the runic letter in particularly Germanic contexts in the poem; cf. his 'Epel-weard: the First Scribe of the Beowulf Manuscript'. See too Senra Silva, 'The Rune “Epel” and Scribal Writing Habits in the Beowulf MS'.

114 For example, Senra Silva, 'The Rune “Epel” and Scribal Writing Habits in the Beowulf MS'.

115 And in particular, see his 'In What Sense was Grendel an angeng(e)or?' in Beowulf 962a; and idem, 'The Conclusion of Wealththeow's Speech (Beowulf 1231)'; idem, 'The Syntactic Analysis of Beowulf, lines 4–5'.
the basic mark of punctuation used in the manuscript itself is the simple point, of which (according to Klaeber and Dobbie) something approaching 700 examples survive in the text of Beowulf, occurring about once every four-and-a-half lines;114 by comparison, only sixteen examples (or about one every twenty lines) are visible in the text of Judith, preserved in the same manuscript.115 In contrast, the recent edition by Mitchell and Robinson (which includes a careful description of their policy in this regard) employs the full panoply of modern punctuation:116 I count twenty examples in the first twenty-five lines of Beowulf alone.117 Such modern editorial intervention can be misleading, as Bruce Mitchell himself has argued with regard to a range of Old English texts,118 and it is at all events clear that while modern punctuation is based on syntax,119 that in the Beowulf-manuscript is based on metre: about ninety per cent of the points in the manuscript-text of Beowulf occur at the end of a full line, and all but twenty-three of the remainder occur at the end of a half-line.120 There are therefore a number of cases in which a point appears in the manuscript marking the

114 For the figures, see Klaeber, ed., Beowulf, p. c; Dobbie, ed., Beowulf and Judith, p. xxx. Rather higher figures are given by Nist, The Structure and Texture of ‘Beowulf’, pp. 111–12, who counts 838 points at the end of verse-lines, together with forty-seven more at the end of half-lines. By contrast, in the transcript given by Kiernan, ed., Electronic Beowulf, I count some 574 single points at the end of complete lines, fifty-seven at the end of a-lines, and twenty-three within individual half-lines. For the last of these categories, see n. 120 below.

115 Dobbie, ed., Beowulf and Judith, p. xxx, notes seventeen such points in Judith; but see Griffith, ed., Judith, pp. 6–7.

116 For details of the policy, see Mitchell and Robinson, ed., Beowulf, pp. 172–5. According to the transcript by Kiernan, ed., Electronic Beowulf, within the first twenty-five lines of Beowulf there are marks of punctuation after lines 1, 3, 8, 11, 15, 17, 19, 23, and 25, and none at all following the a-lines. Modern editions generally include punctuation at the ends of all these lines, except after line 15, which no modern edition punctuates.

117 It should be pointed out, moreover, that Mitchell and Robinson are notably sparing in their imposition of modern punctuation when compared to other editors: comparable figures for punctuation in the first twenty-five lines of Beowulf in the editions of (for example) Kiernan, Klaeber, Wrenn, and Dobbie are twenty-eight, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, and thirty-three respectively. Mitchell has for many years been a vigorous proponent of a new system of punctuation for Old English verse (see in particular his ‘Dangers of Disguise’), and an example of Beowulf punctuated in this fashion appears as an Appendix to Mitchell and Robinson, ed., Beowulf, pp. 313–18. Even under the new system, however, I count twenty punctuation-marks in the first twenty-five lines of Beowulf. See too Mitchell and Irvine, ‘Beowulf’ Repunctuated, where a slightly different set of punctuation marks is employed: I count nineteen in the first twenty-five lines of Beowulf.


119 For difficulties regarding especially the paratactic syntax of Beowulf, see, for example, Andrew, Syntax and Style in Old English, pp. 94–100. For all questions relating to Old English style, the indispensable tool is Mitchell, Old English Syntax.

120 The exceptions are in lines 61a (heorogar), 273a (we.), 320b (stig.), 338a (pet.), 367b (gledman.), 423a (wrec.), 553b (grunde.), 807b (ellor.), 1039a (hilde.), 1146b (fin.), 1159a (laeddon.), 1585b (dæs.), 1974a (laces.), 2252a (ofgeafgesawon.), 2377a (hwæðre.), 2494b (odðe.), 2542a (gesæhw.), 2655b (feorh.), 2673b (byrne.), 2698b (margenes.), 2832b (lacenæde.), 2897a (leafes.), and 2902a (wæl.). In two of these cases (at 423a and 1159a), the word in question is the last on the page. In the context of scribal corrections to the text (on which see below), it is interesting to note that at 158v14 (= line 1301a) a point has been erased after maþðum, and another appears immediately after the following word (gife.). The scribe seems to have recognised that the original point was misplaced: it would have come after the first element of the compound maþðumgife (as in the examples from lines 807b, 1039a, and 2902a above); the point after gife simply marks the caesura. That the scribes could catch one such ‘error’ but miss twenty-three others might raise a sceptical eyebrow at the claims of those who doggedly defend the integrity of the scribes.
end of a full or half-line where the syntactical sense is clearly incomplete, and (for example) subjects and verbs, or nouns and adjectives in agreement, or auxiliary verbs and dependent infinitives which appear in different half-lines are separated by an intervening point.\textsuperscript{121} Naturally, no punctuation is found in any modern edition for any of these occurrences, just as most of the punctuation found in all modern editions has no warrant in the manuscript whatsoever.

\textit{Editing `Beowulf': saving the text}

But if modern lineation, capitalisation, word-division, and punctuation have been freely imposed on \textit{Beowulf}, the same cannot be said of most of the words that make up the text, which have remained largely unchanged since the earliest editions first appeared. In recent years, moreover, there has been a definite trend that make up the text, which have remained largely unchanged since the earlest

\textsuperscript{122} Useful surveys of the history of text-editing with regard to Old English literature in general and \textit{Beowulf} in particular are found in Stanley, `Unideal Principles'; Hall, `Old English Literature'; Fulk, `Inductive Methods'; \textit{idem}, `Textual Criticism'.

\textsuperscript{123} Mitchell and Robinson, \textit{Beowulf: an Edition}, pp. 165–75, offer a brief description of how they arrived at their text.

\textsuperscript{124} Mitchell and Robinson implicitly conjecture the confusion of \textit{hweapere} to \textit{hwaþere} in line 578a; \textit{bræde} to \textit{brade} in line 2207b; \textit{wat} to \textit{æt} in line 2534a), \textit{a} and \textit{e} (emending \textit{steda} \textit{neagla} to \textit{stenægla} in line 985a; \textit{ge sacan} to \textit{gesecan} in line 1004a; \textit{frecnan} in line 1104b; \textit{ed wenden} to \textit{edwenden} in line 1774b; \textit{mæþma} \textit{þy weorþre} to \textit{mæþma ðy weorþre} in line 1902b; \textit{gelæste} to \textit{gelæste} in line 2990b; \textit{twelfa} to \textit{twelfe} in line 3170b), \textit{a} and \textit{e} (emending \textit{brimleade} to \textit{brimlade} in line 1051b; \textit{heand gesteallan} for \textit{handgesteallan} in line 2596b), \textit{a} and \textit{o} (emending \textit{onsole} to \textit{on sale} in line 302a; \textit{hard wyrðne} to \textit{hordwyrðne} in line 2245b; \textit{hlodon} to \textit{hladan} in line 2775a), \textit{a} and \textit{u} (emending \textit{strade} to \textit{strude} in line 3073b; \textit{un} \textit{har} to \textit{anhæar} in line 357a), \textit{æ} and \textit{o} (emending \textit{maestan} to \textit{mostan} in line 2247b), \textit{æ} and \textit{e} (emending \textit{sendep} for \textit{snæd} in line 600a; \textit{secan} to \textit{setan} in line 1602b), \textit{b} and \textit{h} (emending \textit{hettic} to \textit{betic} in line 780a), \textit{c} and \textit{cg} (emending \textit{ec peo} \textit{wes} to \textit{Ecglafes} in line 957b; \textit{eclafes} to \textit{Ecglafes} in line 980; \textit{sec} to \textit{seeg} in line 2863a), \textit{c} and \textit{t} (emending \textit{secan} to \textit{setan} in line 1602b; \textit{wrecce} to \textit{wretæ} in lines 2771a and 3060a), \textit{d} and \textit{t} (emending \textit{feadde} for \textit{fætte} in line 1750a), \textit{d} and \textit{þ} or \textit{o} (emending \textit{hador} to \textit{hador} in line 414a; \textit{ad} to \textit{ad} in line 1107a; \textit{hord mad num} for \textit{hordmaðnum} in line 1198a; \textit{þeod} to \textit{deod} in line 1278b; \textit{gelæste} to \textit{gelæstæ} in line 1837a; \textit{widcuðne} for \textit{widcuðæ} in line 1991a; \textit{að} \textit{swearð} to \textit{aðwæcord} in line 2064a; \textit{forð} in line 2959b; \textit{fædergearwæl} for \textit{fædergearwæm} in line 3119a), \textit{e} and \textit{ea} (emending \textit{oncear} to \textit{oncer} in line 1918a), \textit{e} and \textit{ie} (emending \textit{siexbennum} to \textit{sixbennum} in line 2904a), \textit{eo} and \textit{o} (emending \textit{scotenum} to \textit{sceotendum} in line 1026a; \textit{abroten} for \textit{abroten} in line 1599b; \textit{weordum ond} \textit{worcum} to \textit{wordum ond} \textit{weorcum} in line 1833a; \textit{gearefolm} to \textit{gearefolm} in line 1228a; \textit{bræðre} to \textit{bræðre} in line 2207b; \textit{hwæþere} to \textit{hæþere} in line 2335b; \textit{bræðres} to \textit{bræðres} in line 2335b; \textit{hæþeres} to \textit{hæþeres} in line 2335b).
individual words, perhaps through eye-skip or haplography (the copying of one letter or form for two),
dittography (the copying of two letters or forms for one), and metathesis (the transposition of letters or forms).
It should be noted that these mechanical copying-errors are conjectured to have occurred in the work of both scribes, and amply support the view that each was copying from an exemplar.

An even greater order of conservatism is found in the edition produced by Kevin Kiernan alongside his electronic facsimile of the manuscript and an excellent range of early transcripts. Kiernan is careful to distinguish separate attempts to recover something lost to the manuscript by some kind of damage) and 'emendations' (defined as 'changes [to] or rejection of something that can be clerly seen in the manuscript'); he accepts some 124 'editorial restorations' (listing some 944 further 'early restorations'), but only ninety-one emendations (about one every thirty-five lines). Kiernan therefore implicitly rejects a large number of emendations suggested by generations of previous scholars in order to correct perceived lapses of alliteration or metre in the transmitted text, arguing that such irregularity should be accepted if the sense is (or can be made) clear. Whereas Kenneth Sisam (amongst others) had high-scholars in order to correct perceived lapses of alliteration or metre in the transmitted text, 123 Kiernan, ed., ‘Beowulf’ and the ‘Beowulf’-Manuscript, p. 193, acknowledges, although he beleives that scribe B was working from a different exemplar to scribe A.

So, for example, Mitchell and Robinson read minne for manuscript mine in lines 255b and 418b; Sigemundes secgan for manuscript sige munde secgan in line 875; eglu unheoru for manuscript egl/unheoru in line 987a. For cases in which eye-skip has apparently occurred between words with like endings (so-called homooteleuton), see Lapidge, ‘The Archetype of Beowulf’, p. 5.

So, for example, Mitchell and Robinson read se ecghete for manuscript se secgh hete in line 84a; eafora nu for manuscript eaforun nu in line 1738a; sceata for manuscript sceatta in line 752a; helle for manuscript helle at line 1816a; gefremedon for manuscript ge gefremedan at line 2478b.

So, for example, Mitchell and Robinson read geprühen for manuscript gprühen in line 1285b; aelumpum for manuscript hæleþum in line 332b; hweþere for manuscript hweþere in line 1314a; ægwaðer for manuscript ægwaþe in line 2844a. See too Robinson, ‘Metathesis in the Dictionaries’.

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lighted the possibility of widespread scribal error, Kiernan (following the exhaustive work of Tilman Westphalen) stresses instead the extent to which the scribes of Beowulf appear to have checked and corrected their work. Noting in the manuscript-text of Beowulf ‘about 180 positive examples of intelligent scrutiny on the part of the scribes’, Kiernan argues that ‘the sheer bulk of the erasures and written corrections is testimony to the integrity of the scribes and the reliability of their final copy’. Such an argument would carry more weight were it not for the fact that notwithstanding this ‘intelligent scrutiny on the part of the scribes’, the extant text is far from clean, and Kiernan’s own suggested emendations do not differ significantly in type and quality from those of other editors. So, for example, even in this ultra-conservative edition there is tacit acknowledgment that the scribes of Beowulf could and did indeed commit each of the four kinds of mechanical copying-error identified above, namely translitteratio, omission through eye-skip or haplography, dittography, and metathesis.

Editing ‘Beowulf’: the scribes as editors

In fact, one could argue that the two scribes of the Beowulf-manuscript were in a sense acting as the poem’s first identifiable ‘editors’, since a number of their corrections to their own work, as highlighted by Kiernan and Westphalen, like wise fall into the same four categories of mechanical copying-errors already account for.

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135 So, for example, Kiernan conjectures the omission of wolde in line 139b, sono in line 149b, guman in line 652[651]a (after guma in line 652[651]a), dæd in line 954[953]b (after dædam in line 954[953]a), hafënian in line 1372[1374]a (after hafelan), grund in line 2139[2142]a (part of grundsele, preceding gendeles), heaflo in line 2488[2489]a, gefrægn in line 2694[2695]b, fedan in line 2941[2942]a, wean in line 3000[3002]b, sith in line 3101[3103]b, and on in line 3102[3104]b (after seon ð secean in line 3102[3104]a).
136 So, for example, Kiernan conjectures gefremesdon for manuscript ge gefremedon in line 2478[2479]b.
137 So, for example, Kiernan conjectures hleo for manuscript heol (altered to hol) in line 1229[1231]b, eorl scoldé for manuscript scoldé eorl in line 1328[1330]b, herode for manuscript heorde in line 2930[2931]b, and Peet gifede was for manuscript was Peet gifede in line 3085[3087]b.
numerous cases of alleged 'intelligent scrutiny'. Most frequent of the scribal corrections are and the dittography across a page-break has remained undetected by the scribes’

140 See nn. 135–8 above.
141 At 137r14 (= line 331b).
142 So, for example, we find correction of sine to sinne at 180v8 (= line 2283[2284]a); bil to bill at 190r18 (= line 2777[2778]b); gemete to gemette at 190v14 (= line 2785[2786]b). Cf. Hulbert, ‘The Accuracy of the B-Scribe of Beowulf’.
143 So, for example, we find gellum corrected to gesellum at 162v11 (= line 1481[1483]a); gweox corrected to gewex at 167v3 (= line 1711[1714]a); ungefelice corrected to ungedefelice at 184r(= line 2435[2436]b); ac corrected to ac ie at 186r(= line 2522[2523]a).
144 So, for example, we find correction of dittography of individual letters in the following cases: steappa corrected to steapa in 157v3 (= line 1245[1247]a); gyrrye corrected to gyyre in 158r16–17 (= line 1282[1284]a); findaan corrected to findan in 160v2 (= line 1378[1380]b); sceall corrected to sceal in 170v11 (= line 1862[1865]a). Recognition of a similar kind of copying-error has presumably led to the correction of weorðan to weorpan at 167r22 (= line 1707[1710]b). It will be noted that all of these examples are in the stint of scribe A; scribe B seems rather less prone to this particular kind of copying-error. In the case of dittography of entire words, however, both scribes are culpable: we find, for example, hlaford hlaford corrected to hlafof at 135v15 (= line 267b); man man corrected to man at 141r20 (= line 503[502]b); moste moste corrected to moste at 149r20 (= line 894[893]b); ende ende corrected to ende at 168v2 (= line 1753[1756]a); to to corrected to to at 169v11 (= line 1815[1818]a); manigra manigra corrected to manigra at 176r6 (= line 2091[2094]a); bronde bronde corrected to bronde at 176v19 (= line 2126[2129]a); leodó leóđi corrected to leóđi at 181r14 (= line 2310[2311]a); he he corrected to he at 182v16 (= line 2378[2379]b); his his corrected to his at 189A(197)v(= line 267[2677]b); hyrde hyrde corrected to hyrde at 198r9 (= line 3133[3135]b); to to corrected to to at 198r11 (line 3136[3138]b).

145 For example, translitteratio of a and æ is implied by the correction of sacce to scece at 173v11 (= line 189[1992]a), bledan to hldan at 176v20 (= line 2126[2129]b), faðmic to feðmic at 188v19 (= line 2652[2653]b), and het were to hetware at 193r6 (= line 2916[2917]a). Likewise, the translitteratio of other letter-forms is implied by the following corrections: translitteratio of æ and o in the correction of moste to mæste at 153v5 (= line 1079[1078]b); of a and u in the correction of maðman to maðum at 194v3 (= line 2993[2994]b); of b and h in the correction of bledan to hldan at 176v20 (= line 2126[2129]b); of b and h in the correction of purh to burh at 196v6 (= line 3100[3102]a); of c and cg in the correction of ecþeow to ecgþeow at 135v11 (= line 263b); of c and g in the correction of aglæcean to aglæcean at 192v18 (= line 2905[2906]a); of c and t in the correction of wæc to wæt at 170r5 (= line 1830[1833]b); of d and ð in the correction of scoæden to scoæden at 172v3 (= line 1939[1942]a), sweord to sword at 175v2 (= line 2064[2067]a), and weard to weard at 187r14 (= line 2580[2581]b); of e and i in the correction of wælrie to wælrec at 189A(197)r5 (= line 2661[2662]a); of ðand s in the correction of feæt to ðæst in 136v6 (= line 303a); of h and ð in the correction of his to his at 138r17 (= line 375b); of i and u in the correction of dundum to dingum at 174r5 (= line 2004[2007]a); of l and r in the correction of wyrnþu to wylmþu at 189A(197)r13; of m and n in the correction of hræm to hran at 146v5 (= line 722[721]b) and hundem to buntem at 158r19 (= line 1285[1287]a); of n and nd in the correction of scyppen to sceppen at 132r13 (= line 106a); of n and r in the correction of holdre to holdne at 138r15 (= line 376b) and werede to weneðe at 169v18 (= line 1821[1824]a); and of r and s in the correction of were to weæ at 139r5 (= line 407[406]a).
the kinds of *translitteratio* conjectured by generations of modern editors not only of *Beowulf* but a range of other surviving poems.\(^{146}\)

Several of the corrections to the work of scribe A are apparently the work of scribe B, so arguing for latter’s supervisory capacity and seniority as copyist, a fact perhaps underlined by his use of a slightly more archaic script.\(^{147}\) For this and other reasons, Kiernan argues that scribe B’s role is quasi-authorial, and that the *Beowulf*-manuscript “is the archetype of the epic as we now have it”.\(^{148}\) In this context, the ‘non-correction’ of what scribe B (in common with all modern editors) obviously felt to be a gap in scribe A’s text at 160r17 (= line 1372[1374]a) is surely significant: he uses his normal insertion-mark (a comma,}

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\(^{146}\) An incomplete survey of the critical apparatus to the first four volumes of the ASPR reveals the following cases of common types of supposed *translitteratio*, either emended by the editors or corrected by the scribes: *translitteratio* of a and u in Genesis A 2662b arende for arenda; Exodus 326b pratu for pracu; 442a sand for sund; Andreas 424b sund for sand, 1545b wadu for wudu; Dream of the Reed 117b anforht for unforht; Elene 119a heorugrimme for heora grimme; Christ I 18a þor for þa; Christ III 978b þor for þor; Guthlac A 299b abanne for abunne; Phoenix 72b waniað for wuniað, 171b holttwada for holttwudu; *translitteratio* of n and r in Genesis A 2252b Agar for agan, 2645b þene for þene, 2751b arna for ara; Exodus 321b leon for leor; Elene 1183b foran for fonan; Christ III 927a gehwone for gehwore; Phoenix 336a gehwone for gehwore; *translitteratio* of p and r in Genesis A 2645a beheopan for beheopan, 2730b flettþads for flett þads; Christ and Satan 78a spearcade for speartade (with scribal correction to spearcade), 318b hreopan for hreopan; Elene 996b sponrade for spondrade; Guthlac B 875b stupa for stopum; Juliana 294a bispeop for bispope; *translitteratio* of c and t in Christ and Satan 78a spearcade for speartade (with scribal correction to speartade); Andreas 332b sceatas for steatas (scribal correction); *translitteratio* of d and ð in Genesis A 1642b frod for forð (with metathesis), 1986b þryðge for þryðge, 2007b ahydan for ahudan (with haplography), 2758b wearð for weard (but cf. 2757b weard); Exodus 113b sceado for sceado; Daniel 35a wisde for wisde, 615a wod for wod; Christ and Satan 188b sidos for sídas; Andreas 219b wyrdeð for wyrdeð, 309b bedæled for bedeled, 394b dugud for dugud; *Fates of the Apostles* 43b geleæde for geleæde (scribal correction); *Soul and Body* I 38b god for god; Elene 14a guðweard for guð weard, 531a gehólum for gehðu, 1294a eðles for eðles (plus metathesis); Christ I 4a haefodem for haefod, 69a gendeðe for gendeðe, 364b genyrwad for genyrwad; Christ II 539b hreðer for hreðer, 698b līxèd for līxed, 710b blæd for blæð, 790b dy reþran for dyreþran, 795b leded for ledæð; Christ III 961b geswarða for geswarða, 1337b mældæð for mælled; 1597b biffæste for biffæste (see too Christ I 118a sceadau, 137b toweard, 257b cowear; Christ II 482a widwegas; Christ III 970b geswarða, 1311a unbeted, 1409b gefæstnað: in each case, manuscript ð has been altered to ð); Guthlac A 71b bimutad for bimutæð, 105b weard for wearð, 153b gescorð for gescorða, 245b geþrælað for gedrīgan gan, 296a wid for wid, 391a onwyllad for onwyll leð, 867b gymnweðed for gymn wesþed; Guthlac B 1040a geswertæð for ge swedræð; Phoenix 103a siðne for siðne, 156b side for side (scribal correction), 294a wixélæd for wixleð, 393a geascæð for geascæð side (scribal correction), 491b ledæð for leðæð, 635a singad for singæð; Phoenix 648b onweæðed for on weæned; Juliana 338b ne onwyllæðe for neod cyræð; Seafarer 79b bleð for blæð; Widsith 103a Donne for dón; Maxims I 56b geþingad for geþingað (scribal correction), 109b alfyðed for alfyðed; Panther 38a þeowwiga for þeow wiða, 39b geþwæðdæð for ge biesæða, 41a gewelæð for gewelæða, 59a grund for grund ( scribal correction), 71a ungynýðe for ungynðe; Deor 30b earfða for earfða; Riddle 5.6 forwurðe for wuruðe; Riddle 13.6 side for side; Riddle 20.3 seomad for seomad; Judith 165a þeowned for þeownes. I have in preparation an electronic database of scribal corrections and editorial emendations of the electronic poetic corpus.

\(^{147}\) Dumville, ‘*Beowulf* Come Lately’, p. 55. The corrections in question are of *scyppe* and *scyppend* at 132r13 (= line 106a), of *beorthe* to *beorhtre* at 133r20 (= line 158a), of *dolsceadan* to *dolsceadan* at 140v14 (= line 479[478]a), o to on at 142r13 (= line 537[536]a), *wealþheow* to *wealþheow* at 144r5 (= line 612[611]b), of *ægum* to *ægum* at 147r11 (= line 793[792]b), of *to on* in at 158v15 (= line 1302[1303]b), of *gan to gang* at 160v14 (= line 1391[1393]b), of *fehto* to *fehtd* at 168v3 (= line 1755[1758]b), of *dorog* to *dogore* at 169r19 (= line 1797[1800]b), and of *hreþe* to *hrapæ* at 171v20 (= line 1914[1917]a). See further Kiernan, ‘*Beowulf* and the *Beowulf*-Manuscript’, pp. 272–7, who argues that ‘most of the second scribe’s alterations in the first scribe’s copy are emendations rather than corrections’.

\(^{148}\) Kiernan, ‘*Beowulf* and the *Beowulf*-Manuscript’, p. 278.
so distinguishing his insertions from those of scribe A), but refrains from actually inserting anything at all. Kiernan argues that this non-correction ‘strongly implies that the second did not have an exemplar to refer to when he read and altered the first scribe’s work’, an argument which ignores the possibility that scribe A’s exemplar was itself defective, and scarcely squares with Kiernan’s own case for scribe B’s creative role. The passage in question is a justly celebrated description of how a hunted hart would rather die on the edge of the monster-mere than plunge in, and reads as follows (lines 1368–72):  

Deah þe hæðstapa hundum geswenced,  
heorot hornum trum, holtwudu sece,  
feorrn geflymed, ær he feorh seleð,  
aldor on ofre, ær he in wille  
hafelan [. . .] Nis þæt heoru stow.  

[Even though the heath-stepper, driven by the hounds, a hart strong in its horns, may seek the wooded forest, chased from afar, he will give up his life, his spirit on the brink, rather than [. . .] his head within; that is no pleasant place.]

There is an evident break in sense and metre in line 1372a, although the manuscript moves smoothly from hafelan to nis with only scribe B’s comma to indicate an omission. The two most favoured modern emendations are both based partly on literary considerations: Holthausen and Klaeber supply beorgan (‘to save’), citing as parallel line 1293a (feore beorgan; ‘to save [her] life’); but most other editors (following Kemble) have favoured supplying hydan (‘to hide’), presumably influenced at least in part by the fact that the three preceding lines all contain double alliteration (as would 1372, if the addition of hydan were accepted), and that such sequences of double alliteration in ‘set-piece’ passages are relatively common in Beowulf, where sound-play is often used to highlight particular portions of the narrative. Paying greater attention to the palaeographical possibilities, however, Johan Gerritsen and Alfred Bammesberger have both independently suggested that the missing word is neither beorgan nor hydan, but helan (‘to hide’, ‘to conceal’); as both point out, eye-skip through homeoteleuton from one word to another is particularly possible if we suppose that the phrase in question originally comprised two words (hafelan helan) which both shared the same last four letters. Such a suggestion has a number of attractions, not least because it makes perfect sense,

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149 Ibid., p. 277.  
150 For the manuscript at this point, see Plate 5 above, p. 17, esp. lines 14–17. For literary discussion of the passage, see, for example, Faraci, ‘La caccia al cervo nel Beowulf’; Higley, ‘Aldor on ofre, or The Reluctant Hart’. For a parallel to the scene from a much later Latin text, see Rigg, ‘Beowulf 1368–72: an Analogue’.  
151 See in general Lowe, ‘The Oldest Omission Signs in Latin Manuscripts’.  
152 One might also cite Andreas, line 1538b, which also reads feore beorgan: the half-line is one of a number uniquely shared by Beowulf and Andreas, on the relationship between which see below, pp. 163–6.  
153 See further below, pp. 61–9.  
and manages to maintain both the double alliteration (as the addition of *hydan* would also do) and the assonance (as, ironically enough, is witnessed in the supposed parallel *feore beorgan* in line 1293a) that is characteristic of the aural embellishment of the text at key moments.\(^{155}\) Moreover, precisely such ornamentation is evident in this very passage, which as it stands provides examples of sustained alliteration (three out of five lines alliterate on *h*, which indeed appears in every line; four of the five lines end in words which alliterate on *s*),\(^{156}\) end-rhyme (*geswenced* . . *geflymed*; *hornum trum*), and assonance (four out of five lines feature words in -*l*); all three of these features would only be enhanced by the acceptance of *helan*.\(^{157}\) Here, as elsewhere, one need not overstate the ‘intelligent scrutiny’ of scribe B; assumption of a well-attested mechanical copying error at some stage in the text’s transmission is all that is required.

In much the same way, Kiernan seeks to defend scribe B’s initial indavertant use of the word *fyrwyrmum* (‘fire-dragons’), subsequently corrected to *fyrwylmum* (‘fire-surges’), claiming it as an example of where scribe B ‘was clearly following the sense of the text’.\(^{158}\) True enough, the word occurs in the general context of the dragon-fight, and in the extant corpus the term *fyrwylm* only appears here (*fyrwyrm* does not occur at all). But again, the wider context makes the explanation of a mechanical copying-error far the most likely (lines 2669–72a):\(^{159}\)

\[Æfter ðam wordum wyrm yrre cwom,\]
\[atol inwitgæst, oðre siðe 2670\]
\[fyrwylmum fah fionda niosian,\]
\[laðra manna.\]

['After those words, the dragon advanced angily, the dread hostile spirit, a second time, stained with fire surges, to seek out the foes, the hateful men.‘]

It is hard to see how anyone ‘following the sense of the text’ would suppose that the dragon was ‘stained with fire-dragons’, but quite likely that a scribe copying the sequence *wyrm yrre* . . . *fyr* would initially write *wyrmum* through dittography; the form *fyr* immediately precedes, and the two words *wyrm yrre* in fact appear in the manuscript-line directly above. The textual context may have had some influence on the scribe’s initial choice, but the manuscript context alone is surely sufficient to account for his action.

\(^{155}\) See below, pp. 61–6.

\(^{156}\) Indeed, if we extend consideration of the passage further, to line 1374, it is clear that six out of seven lines end in words alliterating on *s*, with words alliterating on *s* and *st* evidently distinguished; the sequence runs as follows: *geswenced* . . *see* . . *seleð* . . *wille* . . *stow* . . *astiged* . . *styreþ*.

\(^{157}\) Likewise, the last half-line of the sequence echoes the alliterative elements of the first (*heorra stow echoes hæostapa*), although this would of course be the case whatever emendation were accepted.

\(^{158}\) Kiernan, ‘*Beowulf*’ and the ‘*Beowulf*-Manuscript’, p. 216.

\(^{159}\) For the manuscript at this point, see Plate 6 above, p. 18, esp. lines 11–14.
Editing ‘Beowulf’: explaining scribal errors

Similar arguments can be brought to bear to explain apparent errors that remain unemended by either scribe, but which have been faulted (and corrected) by modern editors. It is easy to imagine how a native speaker of Old English might copy the phrase *gewat him on nacan* (‘he went on [board] ship’, line 1903a): the phrase makes sense in isolation, the prepositional use of *on* is well-attested in the poem, and some influence of the forms immediately preceding and following *nacan* (namely *on* and *drefan*) is possible; nonetheless, most editors emend to *naca*, since the wider context seems to demand the alternative adverbial sense of *on* (‘the ship went on’).\(^{160}\) Likewise, simple dittography seems to account for the copying of the perfectly normal form *eaforan* in Hrothgar’s explanation of his knowledge of Beowulf through the latter’s father, Ecgtheow; as it stands, the phrase is, however, hard to construe (*is his eaforan nu heard her cumen, sohte holdne wine*, lines 375b–376),\(^{161}\) but the widely-accepted emendation to *eafora* makes better sense (‘his son has now come here bravely, sought out a trusted friend’). It has recently been argued that Thorkelin’s own transcript of *Beowulf* (the so-called Thorkelin B transcript) is less reliable than that commissioned by him from a third party (Thorkelin A), precisely because Thorkelin’s own (rather less than perfect) knowledge of Old English influenced him in his copying.\(^{162}\) The same of course, might be said in spades for both scribes of the *Beowulf*-manuscript, and should perhaps deter us from placing too much blind faith in their transmitted text.

So much is further clear from a number of cases where eye-skip has been suggested where the metre or meaning seems defective, as in the following passage, describing the reaction of the Danes to Grendel’s initial attacks (lines 138–40a):

\[\text{Þa wæs eaðfynde þe him elles hwær gerumlicor ræste [. . .]}\]
\[\text{bed æfter burum} \quad 140\]
\[\text{[‘Then it was easy to find [a man] who elsewhere [ . . . ] a roomier resting-place for himself, a bed among the out-buildings.’]}\]

The problem evidently lies in line 139b, where the scribe has perhaps mistaken the noun-form *raeste* for a version of the preterite of the verb *restan* (‘rest’; the

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\(^{160}\) For a similar kind of error, cf. line 2448b, where the manuscript clearly reads *ond he him helpan ne mæg* (‘and he cannot help him’), so anticipating the infinitive required by the auxiliary verb *mæg* that in fact occurs at line 2449b (*ænige gefremman*). The presence of the otherwise unexplained adjective *ænige* provides reason enough to emend the verb *helpan* to the noun *helpe* (‘help’) so providing an object for the infinitive *gefremman* and a referent for the adjective *ænige*.

\(^{161}\) Kiernan, ed., *Electronic ‘Beowulf’*, wants to defend the manuscripts-reading as a dative plural; but apart from exciting wild speculation about what Ecgtheow was up to while in exile in Denmark (if the sense is that Beowulf has come visiting others of Ecgtheow’s sons), it is far from clear that such an explanation will serve.

\(^{162}\) Ironically enough, the case is most cogently made by Kiernan, *The Thorkelin Transcripts*, esp. pp. 97–99. See too the rigorously critical examination of Kiernan’s assertions about the transcripts by Gerritsen, ‘What Use are the Thorkelin Transcripts of *Beowulf*?’.
preterite would be *reste*, as at line 1799a);\(^{163}\) clearly some verb is required, and most editors have accepted Grein’s proposed addition of *sohte* (*'sought'), especially because eye-skip from *reste* to *sohte* (or any other preterite verb-form in -te) seems easy to assume. Similar sensitivity to the surrounding context may help in assessing both the manuscript evidence (and the proposed emendations) for the introduction to Beowulf’s penultimate speech before dying (lines 2794–808). The general situation is clear: Wiglaf emerges from the dragon’s barrow, bearing treasure, to find Beowulf close to death; he sprinkles him with water, and Beowulf is rallied enough to begin what will be his final speech (lines 2788–93):\(^{164}\)

\[
\text{He ða mid þam maðmum mærne þioden,}
\text{dryhten sinne, driorigne fand}
\text{ealdres æt ende; he hine eft ongon}
\text{wæteres weorpan, oðþæt wordes ord}
\text{breosthord þurhbræc;}
\text{gomel on giohðe gold sceawode.}
\]

[He [= Wiglaf] then with those treasures found the glorious prince, his own lord covered in blood, at the end of his life; he began again to sprinkle him with water, until the beginning of a speech burst forth from the breast-hoard; old, in pain, he gazed on the gold.]

Although most editors have proposed a variety of half-lines to fill out the apparently missing line 2792b, others have urged caution, arguing that the demands of sense are fully met by the text as it stands, and that the isolated half-line constitutes ‘the strategic use of a dramatic pause’.\(^{165}\) Such a pause would surely be most effective immediately before the speech, however, notwithstanding the fact that the following verse (line 2793) provides a parallel with two further episodes in the poem: first, that in which Hrothgar gazes in uncomprehending awe at the giant sword-hilt from the monster mere (*Hroðgar maðelode, hylt sceawode*, line 1687), and, second, that in which the thief’s lord (who may be Beowulf himself) first gazes on the cup ransacked from the dragon’s hoard (*frea sceawode*, line 2285b). Stylistic considerations may better account for the apparent gap here: the assonance of *wordes ord breosthord* is clear, and most editors wishing to fill the perceived lacuna supply a half-line concluding with (*ge*)spræc (*‘spoke’*), a form that could easily be lost through eye-skip from *þurhbræc;*\(^{166}\) a broad parallel is provided by the extent to which, for example, eye-skip through

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\(^{163}\) For possible scribal confusion of *æ* and *e*, see n. 124 above.

\(^{164}\) In fact, the final speech is interrupted by the narrator describing Beowulf bestowing gifts on Wiglaf; see further below, pp. 52–3.

\(^{165}\) Thus Niles, ‘Editing Beowulf’, pp. 455–6, citing the stray half-line (and the general situation of a warrior’s dying speech) in *The Battle of Maldon*, line 172 as a parallel. There are other verbal parallels linking *The Battle of Maldon* to *Beowulf*; the possibility of direct influence is perhaps worth exploring. For other such apparent borrowings, linking *Beowulf* to a range of extant Old English poems, see below, pp. 163–8.

\(^{166}\) In their edition, Mitchell and Robinson suggest supplying *Bregorof gespræc* (*‘the powerful one spoke’*), on the grounds that ‘it resembles the preceding half-line at both beginning and end and so could have been skipped easily in copying’ (p. 146); they cite as parallel to their hypothesized 2792b–2793a the phrase *worn eall gespræc, gomel on gehðo* (lines 3094b–5a).
homoeoteleuton in the Vercelli homilies is most common where the rhetorical style of the author favours the repetition of aural effects.167 Rather different considerations come into play in the possible emendation of what has been perceived as a similar gap between lines 389a and 390b, where most editors supply two half-lines (at 389b and 390a) to fill out evident failures in the alliteration of those lines. The lines in question represent a transition between two speeches, the first of which is by Hrothgar, speaking to Wulfgar, and welcoming the arrival of the Geats; his speech apparently concludes: ‘Tell them further in words, that they are welcome to the people of the Danes’ (Gesaga him eac wordum, þæt hie sint wilcuman / Deniga leodum, lines 388–389a). The second speech at issue is by Wulfgar, speaking to the Geats, which apparently begins: ‘my victorious lord, prince of the East-Danes, has commanded that you be told that he knows your lineage’ (Eow het secgan sigedryhten min / aldor East Dena, þæt he eower æþelu can, lines 391–2). The perceived difficulty stems from the fact that in the manuscript the transition between these two speeches is accomplished by the single half-line ‘he spoke a word within’ (word inne abead, line 390b), which not only omits both to introduce Wulfgar, the speaker of the lines following, and to explain how he physically gets from Hrothgar to the Geats, but also fails to alliterate with line 389a, which immediately precedes it in the manuscript. Despite recent spirited attempts to defend the manuscript reading as it stands by such senior scholars as (for example) Jack Niles, Allen Frantzen, and Kevin Kiernan,168 the abruptness of the transition cannot be denied.169 A wider consideration both of scribal practice in the Beowulf-manuscript and of the poet’s practice with regard to transitions between speeches, however, only serves to heighten concern at the wisdom of accepting either the manuscript reading as it stands or the majority of the proposed suppletions of the text (which generally add two half-lines, the smallest number which will logically serve to produce two alliterating lines at 389–90).

First, it has been argued that the Beowulf-poet is exceedingly careful about the disposition of his (many) speeches,170 and that in over forty separate

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167 So, for example, it is striking to note from the critical apparatus of Scragg, ed., The Vercelli Homilies, that he identifies no fewer than ten examples of homoeoteleuton in Vercelli X alone (at X.24–5, 25, 26, 29–30, 58, 71–2, 104, 137–8, 160–1, and 203), as against only twenty-three examples in the other twenty-two homilies combined (at II.3; III.159–60; IV.296–7; V.121–2 and 149; VII.75 and 117; IX.58 and 111–12; XVI.155–6; XVIII.161–2; XIX.34, 33–4, 48, 108, and 170; XXII.37. 144, and 189; XXIII.10–13 and 38–9). Vercelli X is noted for its highly crafted rhetorical style, on which see Zacher, ‘Sin, Syntax, and Synonyms’; I am grateful to the author for allowing me pre-publication access to her paper.


169 A rather different strategy is employed by Robinson, ‘Textual Notes on Beowulf’, pp. 109–10, who notes that in lines 965a and 1073b the scribe apparently copied a synonym for the intended word (manuscript handgripe at line 865a will not alliterate, synonymous mundgripe will; manuscript hildplegan at line 1073b will not alliterate, synonymous lindplegan will), and suggests replacing leodum in line 389a with the nearly synonymous weorode (‘troop’, ‘band’). The solution is ingenious, but subject to the same general objections as the others which retain the manuscript-reading. See below.

170 See further below, pp. 203–27. For an outline of the speech-acts in Beowulf, see Table IV below, pp. 206–7.
speech-acts only elsewhere fails to indicate the speaker (whether by name, description, or epithet) on four occasions. Even these four examples, however, do not offer really convincing parallels for accepting the half-line *word inne abead* (line 390b) as the sole link between Hrothgar’s speech and Wulfgar’s, since in every other case the transition occurs between speeches by the same character. Among the briefest of such transitions between speeches is found in Beowulf’s last address to his men before the dragon-fight, when he breaks off before speaking to them for the final time (lines 2516–18a). Although the transition here is briefer than that found elsewhere, there is still no real parallel with what the manuscript provides between Hrothgar’s speech and Wulfgar’s: Beowulf’s last speech to his men is in fact interrupted twice in quick succession (at lines 2510–11a and 2516–18a), as the poet twice stresses that Beowulf is talking for the last time (*niehstan siðe*, line 2510a; *hindeman siðe*, line 2517b), and the wider context gives no room for doubt that in the final transition it is Beowulf who is speaking.

A quite different kind of linking device is used in all three of the remaining cases where speaker, continuing his own speech is not explicitly identified. So, for example, on his return to Heorot, Beowulf breaks off from his lengthy description of his adventures in Denmark (lines 2000–151) to have Hrothgar’s treasures brought in for presentation to Hygelac, before resuming speech to commend the gifts to his lord (lines 2155–62). In this case, however, the transition between speeches is accomplished in three full lines (lines 2152–4), and carefully choreographed by the poet, who marks the beginning and end of the transition by a pair of chiastically arranged verbal phrases describing how Beowulf had the treasure brought in, and how he resumed his speech (*Het þa in beran . . . gyd æfter wræc*, lines 2152a and 2154b). Similar patterns of verbal phrasing signal the transitions between other speeches by the same character where the pronoun is understood, as when Beowulf (in what is probably intended as a parallel scene to Beowulf’s gift-giving to Hygelac) interrupts his last speech in order to commend his neck-ring, arm-ring, helmet, and mail-coat to Wiglaf: the transition takes four full lines (lines 2809–12), beginning with a description of action (*Dyde him of healse*, line 2809a), and ending with an introduction to speech (*het hyne brucan well*, line 2812b). Even though the context is rather different (since he is addressing two different audiences), a very

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171 For an excellent brief analysis of the difficulties of accepting the manuscript-reading as it stands, see Handelman, ‘Wulfgar at the Door’, to which I am indebted for part of the following discussion; see too Tripp, ‘Wulfgar at the Door?’. The transitions in question occur at lines 2152–4, 2516–2518a, and 2809–12 (where Beowulf is speaking); and at lines 2661–2 (where Wiglaf is speaking). A further such example where the speaker is not explicitly identified is that at 2792b, where, however, there are textual difficulties: see above, p. 50.

172 Quite apart from anything else, he is the only one present who has ‘dear companions’ whom he might ‘address’ at this point (*Gegrette da . . . sweæt gesibas*, lines 2516a and 2518a).

173 One might, for example, compare the closing words of Beowulf’s speech to Hygelac (‘Enjoy it all well’ [*Bruc ealles well*, line 2162b]) with the last words of the transition of the speech to Wiglaf (‘He told him to enjoy [it all] well’ [*het hyne brucan well*, line 2812b]); it is certainly striking that when Hrothgar gives Beowulf the treasures he eventually passes on to Hygelac, he too tells him to enjoy them well (*het hyne wel brucan*, line 1045b). If one takes (as I do) the *beah* (‘[arm]-ring’) of line 2812a to be different from the *hring* (‘[neck]-ring’) of line 2809b, then both Hygelac and Wiglaf receive four treasures.
similar transition takes place (lines 2661–2) between Wiglaf’s speeches, first to the faithless retainers before he enters the dragon-fight (lines 2633–60), and then to Beowulf, as he joins him in the fray (lines 2663–8): here again the transition is bounded by half-lines describing first action, then speech (Wod þa þurh þone wælrec, line 2661a; fea worda cwæð, line 2662b).174

Such evidence emphatically throws into doubt the manuscript-reading at 389b–90a, since as it stands the transition between the two different speakers, Hrothgar and Wulfgar, is not simply abrupt, but quite contrary to the highly choreographed introductions to speeches found elsewhere in the poem. A further problem is raised by the fact that acceptance of the transmitted text would entail that Hrothgar’s speech terminates at line 389a, making it the only one of over forty separate speech-acts in Beowulf not to conclude with a b-line. That the Beowulf-poet was careful in the layout of his speeches is apparent from the discussion above, and moreover it is surely striking that (ignoring the apparent exception here) if none of the speeches in Beowulf end with an a-line, they likewise only begin with a b-line in a highly restricted set of circumstances, namely when the speech in question is the second or third speech in a series or exchange spoken together.175 Otherwise, speeches tend to begin with an a-line and end with a b-line: such is surely the model to be followed in suggesting emendations for the otherwise unremarkable transition between Hrothgar’s speech and Wulfgar’s in this highly patterned series of exchanges that preface Beowulf’s arrival into Heorot.176

Examination of the manuscript is instructive at this point, since, as Johan Gerritsen has noted: ‘[t]here is a clear step in the writing between deniga and leodum [line 389a], such as one may find when the pen has temporarily left the writing surface, whether because the writer had to take ink or because he had to look at his exemplar for more text’.177 One might well invoke the principle of scribal eye-skip here again, and note that if the phrase Deniga leodum is found as a formula in Beowulf (lines 389a, 1323a, and 1712b) so too is the phrase Wedera leodum (‘people of the Geats’, lines 697b and 1894b), which would provide a perfect alliterative foil for the half-line word inne abead (line 390b), so naming the folk to whom Wulfgar addressed his speech.178 If such a suggestion for line 390a is accepted, then there is simply no way of knowing how much has been lost between line 389a (Deniga leodum) and a suggested new line 390a (Wedera leodum); it seems unlikely that the poet would have two consecutive

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174 It might be noted that the majority of these transitions between speeches by the same speaker take place in the latter part of the poem, where the speech-patterning in general is quite distinctive; see further below, pp. 227–37.

175 The speeches in question are at 287b–300 (the third in the exchange between Beowulf and the coast-guard); 342b–347 and 350b–355 (the second and third in the exchange between Beowulf and Wulfgar); 2511b–2515 and 2518b–2537 (the second and third in the series spoken by Beowulf to his men before the dragon-fight); and 3114b–3119 (the second in the series spoken by Wiglaf to the Geatish people outside the dragon’s barrow). See further Table IV below, pp. 206–7.

176 On which see further below, pp. 208–18.

177 Gerritsen, ‘Emending Beowulf’ 2253’, p. 451. It is curious to note that although it appeared in the same journal a year earlier, Gerritsen makes no mention of Handelman, ‘Wulfgar at the Door’, which offers much support for his analysis from a more literary perspective.

178 Gerritsen, ‘Emending Beowulf 2253’, p. 451, notes that ‘it is . . . hard to imagine that the on-verse of 390 . . . could have begun with anything else than Wedera’.
Editing ‘Beowulf’: the case for continuing emendation

Taken together, such examples might well offer encouragement to further emendation, even of passages which have so far largely escaped editorial attention. So, for example, the burial-ship that bears Scyld Seafing away on his last voyage is described as isig ond utfus (‘icy and eager to be away’, line 33b). Despite the efforts of several scholars to explain the term isig, the word has continued to puzzle: most of the doublets in Beowulf combine homonyms or antonyms, and there seems no necessary context for the combination used here.182 The most elegant solution may be that offered in an unpublished lecture by Alistair Campbell, who suggested that scribal confusion of s for l caused the form isig to be written for a putative earlier form *ilig, ‘speedy’, cognate with Old High German ilig (Modern German eilig, ‘quick’, ‘urgent’), and so providing an excellent match for utfus (‘eager to be away’).183 While Campbell’s suggested

179 Some rough indication of the possible gap between lines 389a and 390b is offered by the juxtaposition in Hrothgar’s so-called sermon of the phrases leodum þinum (line 1708b; referring to the Geats) and Denigea leode (line 1712b). One should, however, also bear in mind the immediate juxtaposition in consecutive lines of Denigea leode and Wedera leodum in lines 696a and 697b respectively. It might be pointed out that those who defend the manuscript-reading as it stands are prepared to accept the juxtaposition wordum...word in consecutive lines; see too Handelman, ‘Wulfgar at the Door’, p. 477, n. 10. Further indication that a gap greater than supposed by most editors is offered by the swift repetition of the term wilcuman (‘welcome’) in lines 388b and 394b; the whole passage is evidently deliberately echoed when the Geats return to the Danish coast and the coastguard bids them welcome (cwæð þæt wilcuman Wedera leodum, line 1894). On the use by the Beowulf-poet of repeated elements in close proximity as a stylistic and structuring device, see below, pp. 78–85.

180 Kiernan, Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript, p. 187.

181 One might also point to the evident lacuna in both metre and sense at 1803a, apparently caused by a form of eyeskip from ða com beorht scacan (line 1802b: ‘then there came brightly hastening’) to scapan onetton (line 1803b: ‘Warriors hastened’); the two forms scacan and scapan appear consecutively in the manuscript, and are similar enough to cause such eye-skip; the parallel meanings of scacan and onetan may well have assisted the confusion. The minimal required addition of a single half-line at 1803a has been variously supplied as scima æfter sceadwe (‘brightness after shadows’; Sievers’ suggestion) or scima ofer sceadwa (‘brightness over the shadows’; Klaeber’s suggestion); both would provide the alliterative link between lines 1802–3, as well as between the human and natural worlds (for a similar construction earlier in the poem, see below, pp. 65–6); but we cannot be sure that only a single half-line has been lost.

182 See, for example, the explanations of Porru, ‘Beowulf, v. 33: isig ond utfus’; Liberman, ‘The “Icy” Ship of Scyld Seafing’.

183 For the attribution of this emendation to Campbell, see Howlett, British Books, p. 509.
emendation is made on purely philological grounds, it may find some palaeographical support in the fact that both scribes occasionally employ ‘a form like the modern long s’,184 a form perhaps more easily confusible with l than the alternatives, which are also found in the manuscript. A further interesting example of a hitherto unemended form that may repay closer attention is provided by the introductory description of Beowulf as one ‘who was the strongest in might of mankind on that day of this life’ (se was moncynnes maegenes strengest on þæm dæge þysses lifes; lines 196–7), since the phrase is repeated almost verbatim at the opening of the fight with Grendel (se þe monna wes maegene strengest on þæm dæge þysses lifes; lines 789–90). The difference between lines 196b (maegenes strengest) and 789b (maegene strengest) is one that could certainly be explained mechanically either by haplography (s for ss) or dittography (ss for s); and it interesting to note that in both cases the relevant ending has been attracted to that of surrounding words: in 196b we find maegenes alongside moncynnes, pysses, and lifes; and in 789b we find maegene alongside helle, hine, fieste (all in line 788), and dæge. That a related description of Beowulf by Hrothgar later in the poem calls him ‘strong in might and intelligent in mind, a wise word-speaker’ (maegenes strang ond on mode frod, wis wordcwida, lines 1844–5a)185 might appear to strengthen the case that in Beowulf the adjective strang (‘strong’) governs the genitive, and that haplography has occurred in line 789b, were it not apparent that a number of other adjectives in the poem seem to govern both genitive and dative cases.186

It will be clear from the above analysis, however, that even after the assiduous attention of successive generations of modern readers, the Beowulf-manuscript still rewards careful study. The widespread availability of high-quality facsimiles and the continued comparison of earlier transcripts and editions can (and surely should) only stimulate further research and the proposal of still more conjectural emendations to the text. The bare fact of the uniqueness of the text surviving in the Beowulf-manuscript, once one accepts that the scribes were copying from a pre-existing source, makes the full extent of scribal error and interference essentially unknowable, but by following the clues the scribes themselves offer about the errors to which they were prone, and by evaluating conjectural emendations against those supposed with regard to other Old English poems (a few of which do indeed survive in multiple copies),187 it

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184 Malone, Nowell Codex, p. 18, who notes (writing in 1963) that the form was ‘still used within living memory though no longer current’.

185 On this ‘thought, word, and deed’ triad, see below, pp. 73, 146, 218, and 255.

186 See Rudanko, Towards Classifying Verbs and Adjectives Governing the Genitive in ‘Beowulf’. It is worth noting, however, that strang is one of eight adjectives governing the genitive comprising Rudanko’s Class IIa, and referring to ‘health . . . physical strength, or mental presence’ (pp. 80–6: the others are creftig, gemyndig, gesund, hal, heard, seoc, and wis), and that he quotes eighteen examples where these adjectives clearly govern a genitive, two where the adjective seoc (‘sick’) governs a dative with a clear difference in meaning (‘cause’, rather than ‘the respect in which [the noun agreeing with the adjective is sick’, pp. 83–4); the only other case where an adjective from this group apparently governs the dative is precisely the example from line 789b under discussion.

187 See now Orton, The Transmission of Old English Poetry, for a full analysis of all Old English poetry surviving in multiple copies, comprising roughly 2.2 per cent of the extant corpus.
should be possible to exercise some control over the level and type of emenda-
tion proposed. But, as we have seen, conjectural emendation (however brilliant)
should never be so myopic as to exclude the wider context: all such conjectures
surely need to be evaluated carefully against the style of the language and the
structure of the text, the topic to which we now turn.
The style of ‘Beowulf’: beginning at the beginning

The richness of diction in Beowulf has long been the subject of intensive study; indeed, the language and style of the poem are often seen as the yardstick against which other texts, particularly in vernacular verse, have come to be measured.¹ Likewise, there has been a growing realisation that the very structure of Beowulf can best be perceived through a closer understanding of the techniques of composition employed.² For almost half a century, Beowulf has been the primary battlefield upon which the sometimes heated skirmishes of the so-called oral-formulaic debate have taken place, and it would be no exaggeration to say that the whole issue of the precise implications of Beowulf’s clearly formulaic style of composition has (rightly or wrongly) dominated recent literary appreciation of the text.³ The result has been to place Beowulf squarely at the centre of critical discussion concerning the creative tension between a series of conflicting influences (native and imported; traditional and innovative; Germanic and Latinate; secular and Christian; oral and literate; popular and elite) that is perhaps the hallmark of Anglo-Saxon literature as a whole.⁴

The language of Beowulf can largely be said to be based on two opposing principles, namely repetition and variation, which essentially both perform the same function: setting separate elements side by side for the purpose of compar-

² See further below, pp. 78–85.
⁴ Cf. the subtitles used by Liuzza, trans., Beowulf: a New Verse Translation: ‘Beowulf Between Myth and History’ (p. 13); ‘Beowulf Between Song and Text’ (p. 20); ‘Beowulf Between Court and Cloister’ (p. 31).
ison or contrast. Fred Robinson has most fully articulated this aspect of what he has termed ‘the appositive style’, building on the work of others who have focused on one or other of the principles of repetition and variation. Such principles operate at a number of levels of diction, and can be perceived at the sub-verbal level (in the form of alliteration, assonance, dissonance, and rhyme), as well as at the levels of words, compounds, phrases, paragraphs, and themes. Often, the same principles of repetition and variation can be seen to lend structure to the poem as a whole, and work alongside (and occasionally against) existing scribally imposed divisions of the text, whether by capitalisation, pointing, spacing, or the use of roman numerals to break the text down into separate sections or *fitts.* Other more clearly aurally-derived techniques of repetition are used to divide the poem into verse-paragraphs, whether through repetition of sounds, words, or phrases at the beginning and end of such paragraphs (the so-called ‘envelope-pattern’), or the repetition of sounds, words, or phrases at the beginning of successive verse-paragraphs (a technique sometimes described as ‘incremental repetition’, and parallel to that of anaphora in Classical rhetoric). Like many other composers of Old English verse, the *Beowulf*-poet also uses a range of pithy, self-contained and understated phrases, often couched in the form of a proverb or other gnomic expression, more or less as marks of aural punctuation: on a number of occasions such gnomic phrases start or end speeches or *fitts*, or break down the narrative into more manageable sections.

Several of these characteristic stylistic traits can be seen in the very opening lines of the poem (lines 1–11), which celebrate the heroic endeavours of bygone days that will prove the poet’s main stated theme, as follows (with structural alliteration within the line highlighted in bold, and ornamental interlinear alliterative effects underlined):

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5 Robinson, ‘*Beowulf*’ and the Appositive Style.
7 See further Table II and the discussion below, pp. 91–7.
8 On the use of such techniques in Old English poetry in general, see, for example, Orchard, ‘Oral Tradition’; *idem*, ‘Re-reading The Wanderer’. See too Stévanovitch, *Beowulf*: de la forme au sens.
10 The standard study remains that of Jackson, ‘Incremental Repetition in the Early Welsh *Englyn’*; see too Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 4–61; Orchard *The Hisperica famina* as Literature.
13 The manuscript reads *eorl* at line 6a and *para* for *þær* in line 9; for *þær* (line 9), see Jack, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 28; Pope, ‘Irregular Anacrusis’, pp. 105–10.
Listen! We have heard of the power of the mighty kings of the Spear-Danes in bygone days, how those [or ‘then’] princes did bold deeds. Often Scyld Scefing snatched off mead-benches from bands of foes, from many nations, spread awe amongst warriors since first he was discovered destitute; he had comfort for that: he grew under the skies, flourished in glorious deeds, until each of the neighbouring peoples there over the whale’s riding had to obey, pay tribute. That was a good king.

These opening lines of the poem, which in a wholly self-contained fashion describe the mysterious arrival and equally mysterious departure of the intriguingly named Scyld Scefing (‘Shield, son of Sheaf’), from whom the Danish royal house is descended, establish many of the themes of the poem as a whole, and set up resonances which can still be perceived in the closing lines of the poem. It has often been observed that Beowulf begins and ends with a funeral,14 but the tone of the opening and closing sections (let alone the rest of the poem) is far from consistently elegiac.15 The martial valour celebrated in these first eleven lines of the poem is precisely what is picked up time and again in the course of the poem: ‘bold deeds’ (ellen) lie at the heart of Beowulf, which richly depicts the doings and foreign forays of successive generations of ‘mighty kings’ (þeodcyninga).16 The venerable antiquity of the action ‘in days of yore’ is stressed in the opening line (geardagum), and perhaps again in the third line, if ða is taken (as it well might be) not as the definite article, but as the adverb ‘then’.17 Such possibilities of multiple and layered meanings are the hallmark of the Beowulf-poet, as we shall see.18

But aside from setting a stirring scene, these opening lines are a typical

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14 See, for example, Bonjour, Digressions, pp. 1–11.
15 Cf. Tolkien, ‘Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics’, p. 275: ‘Beowulf is not an “epic”, nor even a magnified “lay”. No term borrowed from Greek or other literatures exactly fit: there is no reason why they should. Though if we must have a term, we should choose rather “elegy”. It is an heroic-elegiac poem.’
16 It is instructive to note that the term ellen or its compounds occur no fewer than twenty-five times in the course of the poem (lines 3b, 86a, 340a, 358a, 573b, 602a, 637a, 661a, 828a, 876a, 900a, 902a, 958a, 1464a, 1471a, 1787b, 2122a, 2349a, 2399a, 2643a, 2695b, 2706b, 2787a, 3063a, and 3173b), if ða is taken (as it well might be) not as the definite article, but as the adverb ‘then’.17 Such possibilities of multiple and layered meanings are the hallmark of the Beowulf-poet, as we shall see.18

See below, pp. 238–64.
example of this poet’s art. The initial call to attention (Hwæt) is echoed in a number of other Old English poems, as is the use of the ‘we have heard’ formula, appealing to a supposed common knowledge of famed past events; a related device (‘I have heard’) is found elsewhere in Beowulf (lines 74, 776, 1011, 1197, and 2163), but this is the only time in the poem when the poet uses the inclusive first-person plural form. The passage ends with a pithy self-contained half-line (þæt wæs god cyning), that is likewise echoed elsewhere in the poem (at lines 863b and 2390b). The diction of this passage, as in Old English poetry in general and Beowulf in particular, is richly noun-based: in these eleven lines we find nineteen nouns but only ten finite verbs and (unusually for a passage of this length in Beowulf) only three adjectives. Several of the finite verbs, moreover are rather bland and colourless (such as fremedon [‘did’], wearð [‘was’], scolde [‘had to’], and wæs [‘was’]), and again underline the relative importance of the nouns, and more specifically of the compound nouns. The proportion of compound nouns here (seven out of nineteen, of which one, meodosetla, is unique to the poem) signals their weight; in the 3182 lines of Beowulf, Arthur Brodeur, in the course of a masterful analysis, counted 903 distinctive noun-compounds (as opposed to 675 distinctive simplexes), 518 of which are unique to Beowulf, and 578 of which occur only once in the poem.

The poet emphasises two such compounds in the opening line of the poem, highlighting their importance through the extra ornament of cross-alliteration. That the structural alliteration of this line (Gar-Dena...geardagum) should rely on recognition of an identity between two pronunciations of g (guttural and palatal respectively), a distinction that apparently arose in the eighth century, has been used by some to argue that the poem must predate such a linguistic innovation; it seems at least as likely that the poet is emphasising the archaic nature of his theme by recourse to an archaic and (by the time of the poet) utterly traditional alliterative pattern. In other respects, moreover, in this passage the poet clearly emphasises his material through alliterative ornament.

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19 See, for example, line 1 of Exodus, Andreas, Fates of the Apostles, The Dream of the Rood, Juliana, Væinglory, Solomon and Saturn, Judgment Day II, and Metrical Charm 2, not to mention several sections of the Metres of Boethius and the Paris Psalter.

20 For a study of the use of this and related formulas (‘I have heard’; ‘as I have heard tell’) see Parks, ‘“I Heard” Formulas in Old English Poetry’.

21 See further below, pp. 99–100.

22 Nouns (compound nouns are marked with an asterisk): Gar-Dena*, geardagum*, peodecyninga*, hrvm, æplingas, ellen, Scyld Scæing, scealpena, pretium, meægum, meodosetla*, eor[las], frotre, wolenum, weormyndum*, ymhsittendra*, hronrade*, gomban, and cyning; verbs: gefrunon, fremedon, ofteah, egode, wearð, gebad, weox, þah, scolde, and wæs; adjectives: monegum, feascæft and god.

23 Brodeur, Art of Beowulf, pp. 1–38. For a further analysis of the poet’s use of such compounds, see pp. 69–72.


Beowulf is relatively unexceptional in its use of double alliteration (in which both stressed syllables of the a-line alliterate with the first stressed syllable of the b-line), by comparison with other Old English poems.\textsuperscript{26} It is therefore striking that the six lines which exhibit this pattern (lines 4–8 and line 11) should all cluster in the verses which introduce Scyld Scefing. That the final line of the passage (line 11) should contain double alliteration is perhaps also significant (line 12 does not): the same pattern of continued double alliteration is found at the end of the fitt (lines 48–52) and, indeed, the poem (lines 3181–2).

At the very beginning of his poem, then, the Beowulf-poet effectively lays out his stall, using a range of devices to underscore his story at all levels of diction.

The wall of sound: alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and other sub-verbal effects

The most obvious form of aural repetition at the sub-verbal level of diction in Beowulf is alliteration, which the poet uses artfully in a number of ways.\textsuperscript{27} The importance of alliteration as the underlying principle of Old English verse has been underlined several times in recent years, as has the propensity of many poets to employ specific alliterative patterning both within and between lines not only to highlight particular passages but for structural effect.\textsuperscript{28} The Beowulf-poet’s favoured form of artful alliteration appears to lie in the clustering of double alliteration, a pattern he repeats throughout the text to highlight a large number of key passages in the poem. Beowulf is proportionately rich in double alliteration: almost half of the lines in the poem contain the feature.\textsuperscript{29} But such a raw statistic masks the way in which the Beowulf-poet employs double alliteration in irregular clusters: there are large tracts of the piece which contain little or no examples of double alliteration at all. That clusters of double alliteration can form a bridge linking adjacent passages is in fact perfectly illustrated at the junction between the first (unnumbered) fitt, or manuscript-section of the poem,\textsuperscript{30} and what in the manuscript is fitt I: the linked passages describe first the funeral of Scyld Scefing, and then the rise of his son, Beow (lines 47–58):\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{26} For a useful table giving the percentages of double alliteration found in a number of Old English poems, see Hutcheson, Old English Poetic Metre, p. 271.


\textsuperscript{28} See the table referred to in n. 26 above.

\textsuperscript{29} On the fitt-divisions in Beowulf, see Table II below, pp. 94–5. The fitt-division here comes after line 52.

\textsuperscript{30} The manuscript reads sele rædenne at line 51b, and beowulf at line 53b. For the name of Scyld’s son as Beow (rather than manuscript ‘Beowulf’), see below, pp. 103–4.
Then they set above him a golden standard, high over his head, let the sea carry him, gave him to the ocean; their spirits were sad, hearts grieving. Folk cannot say for sure, hall-counsellors, heroes under the heavens, who received that load. Then there was in the strongholds Beow of the Scyldings, a beloved king of the people; for a long time famed among folk – his father had disappeared elsewhere, the prince from the land – until after him arose high Healfdene, who governed while he lived, ancient and battle-fierce, the happy Scyldings.

The clustering of double alliteration here seems self-conscious, effectively dividing the passage equally into two sections of six lines each (lines 47–52 and 53–8), with five lines of double alliteration preceded by a line of single alliteration in each. Certainly the strike-rate of double alliteration in these dozen lines (at over 80 per cent) seems unusually high: less than half of the next forty lines exhibit the feature.32

In introducing Grendel, the poet likewise uses a condensed variety of alliterative effects in a single passage (lines 86–98):33

[Then the mighty spirit, who waited in the darkness, endured grievously for a time that he heard each day joy, loud in the hall; there was the


33 I end the passage at this point out of simple convenience; it has been argued that the following lines, usually taken to refer to Grendel (lines 99–101, cited below), can also be read as part of the pre-lapsarian fall. See further Ball, ‘Beowulf’ 99–101’, and below, pp. 137–8.
sound of the harp, the clear voice of the poet. The one who could recount from past ages the first-making of men spoke, said that the Almighty created the earth, the fair bright plain which water encircles; triumphing in might he set the sun and the moon as lamps to give light to the dwellers on earth, and he adorned the earth’s corners with branches and leaves; he also fashioned life for each of the kinds that move around alive.]

Of the thirteen lines which comprise this passage, no fewer than eight exhibit double alliteration (lines 87, 88–91, 93–5, and 97), three cross-alliteration (lines 88, 93, and 98), and seven interlinear alliteration (lines 88–90, 92–3, and 96–7). A handful of examples of paronomasia or wordplay (leoman . . . leomum, lines 85a and 97a; leafum . . . lif, line 97) complete the picture. The effect is almost unparalleled within Beowulf, and serves to demonstrate part of the range of effects this skilful poet had at his disposal to highlight individual passages.

It seems likewise significant that the next important cluster of double alliteration comes in the celebrated passage that first links Grendel with the kin of Cain, and concludes the first numbered fitt (lines 99–110):34

Swa ďa drihtguman ̈ dreamum lifdon ̈ eadiglice, ̈ ọđōet an ongan ̈ fyrene fremman ̈ feond on helle. ̈ Wæs se grimma gæst ̈ Grendel haten, ̈ mære mearcstapa, ̈ se Ḟe moras heold, ̈ fen ond fæsten; ̈ fifelcynnes eard ̈ wonsæli wer ̈ weardode hwile, ̈ sīpðan him scyppend ̈ forscrifen hæfde ̈ in Caines cyne. ̈ Þone cwealm gewræc ̈ ece drihten, ̈ Ḟæs Ḟe he Abel slog; ̈ ne gefeah he Ḟære fæhðe, ̈ ac he hine fœr forwræc, ̈ metod for Ḟy mane, ̈ mancynne fram. ̈ 100 ̈ 105

[‘So those noble warriors lived in joy, happily, until one began to perform wickedness, a fiend in hell. That grim spirit (or ‘guest’, ‘stranger’) was called Grendel, a well-known march-stepper, who ruled the wetlands, the fens and fastnesses; the unhappy man occupied for a time the dwelling-place of the monster-kin, once the Creator had proscribed him (or ‘them’) among the kin of Cain: the eternal Lord wrought vengenance for that killing, when he slew Abel. He did not rejoice in that feud, but God drove him far away from mankind for that crime.’] ̈ 110

A number of points are worth making about this passage, which is otherwise notable for a number of instances of paronomasia or wordplay (maer/-mearc/-mor-, line 103; wer/weard-, line 105; -feah/fæhð-, line 109; man/-man-, line 110).35 At first glance, a clear contrast is made between the joys of the happy

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34 In line 107a, caines has apparently been altered from manuscript cames, whereas at line 1261b Cain is written camp. See further Pulsiano, ‘“Cames cyne”: Confusion or Craft?’.

35 On the significance of the pun maer/-mearc/-mor-, which occurs elsewhere in the poem, see Sharma, ‘Movement and Space as Metaphor in Old English Poetry’, pp. 207–39.
Danes (dreamum lifdon eadiglice, lines 99–100) and the sorrows of Grendel and Cain (grimma, line 102b; wonsæli, line 105a; Ne gefeah, line 109a). But although both the latter are exiled far from men (feor . . . mancynne fram, lines 109–10), we know than Cain was a man, as too is Grendel (wer, line 105a). Both act like kings already mentioned in the poem: like Healfdene, Grendel ‘ruled’ his domain (heold, lines 57b and 103b), whilst the descent of monsters from Cain is described in similar terms to that of the Danish royal house from Beow, Scyld’s son (onwoc, line 56b; wocun, line 60a; onwocon, line 111b). Other resonances which run through the rest of the poem are established here. The reversal the Danes experience at Grendel’s hands occurs, we later learn, after Hrothgar has ruled the kingdom for fifty years (ic Hring-Dena hund missera weold under wulcnum, lines 1769–70), until the singular creature, already present close at hand, turns against them (oððæt an ongan, line 100); in precisely parallel terms we learn that Beowulf ruled the Geats for fifty years until another singular creature, the dragon, already present close at hand, wreaks its vengeance (He geheold tela fiftig wintra . . . oððæt an ongan, lines 2208–10; 36 Ic ðæs leode heold fiftig wintra, lines 2732b–3a). It is further striking to note that the poet uses very similar language to describe how Grendel’s mother ruled the monster mere for fifty years until another singular creature, this time Beowulf himself, invades her realm (floda begong . . . beheold hund missera, lines 1498b–9). 37 In this way, the poet appears through verbal repetition to cause thematic links to be made across stretches of narrative, and in this case the effect of the repetition is for the distinctions between the worlds of monsters and men to become blurred. 38

Likewise, the extensive use of double alliteration (and other sub-verbal effects) highlights the description of Beowulf’s first entrance into Heorot and his introductory speech to Hrothgar (lines 399–414): 39

Aras þa se rica, ymb hine rinc manig,
þryðlic þegna heap; sume þær bidon,
heæoreaf heoldon, swa him se hearda bebead.
Snyredon ætsomne, þa secc wisode,

36 However, Shippey, Old English Verse, p. 38, says of the apparent echoes between the advents of Grendel and the dragon that: ‘Probably the parallelism is not deliberate. For poets of this type it is natural to see joy growing into sorrow, and to pull the two opposites together, carefully linked within a sentence.’ But, as we shall see, such verbal repetition is by no means isolated, and seems part of this poet’s stock-in-trade as a structuring device.

37 One might also note what is said of the dragon, which ‘ruled for three hundred years, until one man enraged him in his heart’ (þreo hund wintra heold . . . oððæt hyne an abealch mon on mode, lines 2278b–81a).

38 See further below, pp. 162, 196, and 256.

39 There is no gap in the manuscript to indicate an apparently missing half-line (or, as I suspect, more) at line 403b; likewise, the manuscript reads hador at line 414a (for δ/d-confusion, see above, pp. 42–6). I take the otherwise unattested reading hador from Mitchell and Robinson, ed., Beowulf, p. 62, and agree that the word probably means something like ‘vault’; the poet has produced a fine series of nesting images, with Beowulf and his men passing under the protecting vault of Heorot’s roof (under Heorotes hrof, line 403a), as Beowulf himself walks under the protecting vault of his helmet (heard under helme, line 404a), and talks about the evening sun passing under the protective vault of the sky (under heofenes hador, line 414a). Cf. Grein, Sprachschatz der angelsächsischen Dichter, p. 306, where the word heador is glossed as receptaculum (‘shelter’).
under Heorotes hrof
heard under helme, þæt he on heoðe gestod.
Beowulf maðelode (on him byrne scæn, 405
searonet seowed smiþes orþancum):
‘Wæs þu, Hroðgar, hal! Ic eom Higelaces
mæg ond magoðegn; ðæbbe ic maðaða fela
ongunnen on geogoþe. Me wearð Grendles þing
on minre eþeltyrf undyrne cuð;
secgað sæliðend þæt þæs sele stande,
reced selesta, rinca gehwylcum
idel ond unnyt, siððan æfenleoht
under heofenes haðor beholen weorþeð.’

[The mighty man arose, and many a man with him, a powerful throng of
thegns; some remained there, guarded the battle-equipment as the brave
man bid. They hastened together as the man led them, under Heorot’s
roof; [he went?] brave under his helmet, so that he stood inside. Beowulf
spoke (on him his corselet shone, the cunning weaving sewn through a
smith’s great skill): ‘May you, Hrothgar, be well! I am Hygelac’s
kinsman and close thegn; I have accomplished many great deeds in my
youth. The matter of Grendel was made no secret to me in my native
land; seafarers say that this building, best of halls, stands empty and
useless to every man, once the evening’s light becomes hidden under the
vault (?) of heaven’.]

There are a number of effects employed in this passage, which clearly describes
an important point in the narrative of the poem as a whole. 40 Apart from the
insistent use of double alliteration, one might note some interesting examples of
interlinear alliteration: lines 403–4, whatever one makes of the apparently
defective line 403, clearly contain continued (double?) alliteration on h; 41 and
lines 400–1 and 411–12 are linked both by alliteration and paronomasia through
the pairs bibead . . . bidon and sele . . . selesta). Still more intriguing are the
verbal and thematic repetitions found in the passage. The identical half-line
heard under helme (line 404a: ‘brave under the helmet’) is found earlier in the
poem (line 342a) in precisely the same context, introducing Beowulf’s first
speech to the coastguard. Likewise, the only other time the phrase is used in the
entire poem, it again refers to Beowulf, as he sets off to fight the dragon after
making his final boast (lines 2538–41):

        Aras ða bi ronde rof oretta, 2540
heard under helme, hioroscercean bær
under stancleofu, strengo getruwode
anes mannes. Ne bið swylc earges sið.

[Then the bold warrior arose by his shield, hard under his helmet, he
bore his battle-shirt under the stone cliffs, put his faith in the strength of
a single man: such is not the coward’s way.]

40 See below, p. 212.
41 See above, pp. 47–8.
In this case, the poet cleverly repeats an emphasis on the defensive armour (ronde . . . helme . . . hiorosercean) and sole strength (strengo . . . anes mannes) in which he puts his faith as Beowulf dashes off to die: none of these things can save him. But it is striking to note that the repeated half-lines 2539a and 404a are not the only parallels to link these passages: lines 399a and 2538a are the only examples of the Aras þa-formula in the entire poem, and the series of half-lines under Heorotes hrof. . . heard under helme and heard under helme . . . under stancleofu (lines 403a/404a and 2539a/2540a) represent the only pairs in which the preposition under is used in consecutive lines. As we shall see, such complex patterns of verbal repetition are widely used in Beowulf for a variety of effects.

Rhyme is another feature of the sound-patterning of Beowulf which perhaps warrants more attention than it has received so far; certainly, this particular brand of aural ornamentation is a key feature of such self-contained phrases as frod ond god (line 279a), hond ond rond (line 656a; cf. hond rond gefeng, line 2609b), seel ond meel (line 1008b; cf. sæla ond meela in line 1611a), ge wið freond ge wið freond (line 1684a), and (perhaps) swelan ond swellan (line 2713a). Even individual compounds, such as the evidently tautologous þryðswyð (‘powerful in might’, lines 131a and 736b) or the equally perplexing foldbold (‘ground-building’), both of which are unique to the poem, have apparently been coined for their sheer playfulness; and a poet who can delight in such sonorous phrases as swiðferhþes sið (line 908a), fylle gefægon, fægere geþægon (line 1014), suhtergefæderan . . . ætgeedere (line 1164), flod blode weoll (line 1422a), snytru bryttað (line 1726b), guðum cuð (line 2178a), broðor oðerne (line 2440a), wordes ord breosthord (lines 2791b–2792a), and wordgyd wrecan ond ymb wer sprecan (line 3173) is surely composing for the ear rather than the eye. The last three lines of the poem combine a number of these sub-verbal effects beautifully, and draw the poem to a fitting close (lines 3180–2):

cwædon þæt he wære wyruldcyninga
mannum mildust ond monðwærust,
leodum liðost ond lofgeornost.

42 For a comparable passage, see below, p. 234.
43 See below, pp. 78–85.
44 See in general Stanley, ‘Rhymes in English Medieval Verse: from Old English to Middle English’.
45 See further Berendslohn, Zur Vorgeschichte des ‘Beowulf’, pp. 187–8, who, however, also includes a number of phrases where a single word is repeated. On the latter collocations, see below, pp. 78–9.
46 Cf. Cook, ‘Beowulf 1422’.
47 There are a number of textual difficulties with these lines: the manuscript clearly reads wyruľdcyning at 3180b and only the first three and last three letters of monðwærust (line 3181b) are visible. A different kind of problem is presented by the final letter of mannum = mannun in line 3181a, long read (and translated) as an -a. Aesthetic reasons surely support reading mannum here, to provide a closer parallel to the following line; and surely the Beowulf-poet would not wish to vary the mighty wyruľdcyning with the mundane *manna. On the difficulties of these lines, see further, for example, Clark, ‘Beowulf: the Last Word’; Cronan, ‘Lofgeorn: Generosity and Praise’; Deskis, ‘An Addendum to Beowulf’s Last Words’; Frank, ‘Old Norse Memorial Eulogies and the Ending of Beowulf’; Harris, ‘Beowulf’s Last Words’; Malone, ‘A Reading of Beowulf 3169–3182’; Mitchell, ‘Linguistic Facts and the Interpretation of Old English Poetry’, p. 12; Owen-Crocker, The Four Funerals in ‘Beowulf’, pp. 103–5; Richards, ‘A Reexamination of Beowulf ll. 3180–3182’; Riley, ‘Beowulf, Lines 3180–82’; Wieland, ‘Manna mildost: Moses and Beowulf’; Wright, ‘Moses, manna mildost (Exodus, 550a)’. 
They said that he was of worldly kings the mildest to men and the most gracious, the kindest to nations, and the keenest for fame.

The sound-play of *wær*-/*wyr*- and *man*-/*mon*- in the opening two lines of this passage gives way to double alliteration, end-rhyme, and precisely repeated rhythms in the last two. With such a range of sound-effects this essentially aural poem draws to a close.

The rhythmical effect found in the closing lines of the poem is all the more striking since such a use of repeated rhythms is in fact not very common in *Beowulf*, where the repetition of the same rhythm over successive lines seems rather to be used to delimit or highlight particular passages. The long lines that introduce the entrance of the stately Wealhtheow into Heorot after the trauma of the telling of the Finn-episode, for example, beautifully set off a self-contained vignette of the Danish court (lines 1162b–1168a):48

Then Wealhtheow came forth, striding under a golden diadem, where the goodly pair sat together, uncle and nephew; at that time their kinship was still intact, each true to the other. Likewise, Unferth the *þyle* sat there at the foot of the lord of the Scyldings; each of them trusted his spirit, that he had great courage, even though he was not merciful to his kinsmen at the play of swords.

The significance of other clusters of long lines (at lines 1705–7 and 2995–6) is more difficult to assess;49 the first comes in the middle of Hrothgar’s so-called ‘sermon’,50 while the second has recently been dismissed as a possible interpolation.51 It is interesting to note that another passage in Hrothgar’s sermon that relies on repeated rhythms and on anaphora has also been signalled as a possible interpolation (lines 1762b–1768):52
Certainly, these lines have much in common with a number of Old English homilies and sermons, which often use similar runs of repeated rhythmical phrasing to highlight key passages, and the effect seems deliberately chosen here to underscore the different tone of what is being said at this point. Beowulf’s oath to Hrothgar to pursue Grendel’s mother remorselessly may also be of relevance here, since it relies on an apparently similar technique (lines 1392–4):

\[
\text{Ic hit þe gehate, no he on helm losaþ, ne on foldan fæþm, ne on fyrgenholt, ne on gyfenes grund, ga þær he wille.}
\]

[I promise you: he shall not disappear under cover, neither in the bosom of the earth, nor in the mountain wood, nor in the bottom of the sea, wherever he goes.]

In this case, however, while biblical and Vergilian parallels have been suggested, the phrasing of this promise looks most similar to Norse formulas dealing with the prosecution of outlaws, of which an excellent example is found in the much later Icelandic Grettis saga, a text which has been seen to contain a number of parallels and analogues to Beowulf. Such a parallel is the more interesting since Grendel himself is not only of the kin of Cain, but is depicted (rather sympathetically) as something of an exile or outlaw: once again, the

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53 See further below, pp. 159–61.
54 Klaeber, Beowulf, p. 184.
55 Jónsson, ed., Grettis saga, pp. 232–3 (ch. 72); Fox and Pálsson, trans., Grettir’s saga, p. 150.
56 See further below, pp. 124 and 142.
style of discourse seems specially tailored to fit the needs of the text. At all events, immediately following this vow, which might be seen as a purely rhetorical outburst, Beowulf is soon to take his pursuit literally underground, beneath mountain-forests, and on the sea-bed in his relentless search for Grendel’s mother into her lair, which this promise neatly (if perhaps from Beowulf’s own view, unintentionally) describes.  

Varying words: synonyms, compounds, and unique forms

The greatly varied manner in which Beowulf describes the monster-mere highlights another important aspect of the Beowulf-poet’s technique, namely the sheer number of words, compounds, and coinages at his disposal. Several studies (especially by Caroline Brady) have demonstrated the ingenuity of the Beowulf-poet in this respect. To discuss even such a commonplace concept (in this context) as ‘sword’, the poet could use a number of simple terms (such as bil, brond, ecg, heoru, mece, or sweord) offering a range of alliterative possibilities. By the use of metonymy (for example, by using the word ired [‘iron’]) or by specifying a type of sword (such as a short-sword or seax), or by naming a specific weapon (such as Hrunting, Unferth’s sword, or Nægling, used by Beowulf against the dragon), the poet could slightly increase his range of reference. But by compounding these simple words, he could add to the list the terms beadomece, guðbil, guðsweord, hildebil, hildemece, wigbil, all of which essentially mean ‘battle-sword’; he could form other compounds based on these words to describe other attributes of the weapon, such as ealdsweord (‘old sword’), gomelswyrd (‘old sword’), hãfteimece (‘hilted sword’), maðþumsweord (‘treasure-sword’), wægsweord (‘wave-patterned sword’); he could describe a type of sword (such as brogdennmæl, hringmæl, sceadenmæl, or wundenmæl, all of which are varieties of damascened or otherwise adorned weapons); or he could introduce metaphor, and refer to a sword as a ‘battle-light’ (beadoleoma or hildeleoma) or a ‘war-friend’ (guðwine). These last two examples are impor-

and the Devil”; Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, pp. 28–57; Storms, ‘Grendel the Terrible’; Williams, ‘The Exile as Uncreator”; Zachrisson, ‘Grendel in Beowulf’. Particular mention should be made of John Gardner’s novel, Grendel, which seeks to tell the story of Beowulf from the monster’s point of view.


60 See, for example, Brady, ‘The Synonyms for “Sea” in Beowulf’; idem, ‘ “Weapons” in Beowulf’; idem, ‘ “Warriors” in Beowulf’. Useful general studies include Carr, Nominal Compounds in Germanic; Gardner, Semantic Patterns in Old English Substantival Compounds; Niles, ‘Compound Diction and the Style of Beowulf’. More specific analyses are those by, for example, Bryan, ‘Ærgod in Beowulf, and other Old English Compounds of ær’; Hulbert, ‘A Note on Compounds in Beowulf’; Magoun, ‘Recurring First Elements in Different Nominal Compounds in Beowulf and the Elder Edda’; Mazo, ‘Compound Diction and Traditional Style in Beowulf and Genesis A’; Menzer, ‘Aglecwif (Beowulf 1259a): Implications for -wif Compounds, Grendel’s Mother, and Other aglæcan’; Vickrey, ‘On the eord-Compounds in the Old English Finn-Stories’.

61 On the significance of swords in Beowulf, see below, pp. 76, 81–2, 135–6, and 198–9.

62 Such metaphorical compounds are customarily called ‘kennings’ after the Old Norse-Icelandic formulation. See further, for example, Gardner, ‘The Application of the term “Kenning”’.
tant in underlining the flexibility of the *Beowulf*-poet’s diction, since both *hildeleoma* and *guðwine* occur elsewhere in the poem in senses other than ‘sword’: if the poet apparently refers to the sword Hrunting as a ‘war-friend’ (*guðwine*) at line 1810a, he certainly later refers to human warriors as ‘war-friends’ (*guðwinum*, line 2735a), and if a warrior can place a ‘battle-light’ (*hildeleoman*, line 1143b) that is also referred to as the ‘best of swords’ (*billa selest*, line 1144a) on Hengest’s lap to stir him to vengeance, so too the dragon can attack Beowulf with a ‘battle-light’ (*hildeleoman*, line 2583a) that is also described as a ‘murderous fire’ (*wælfyre*, line 2582a). In the latter case, the poet is playing on a poetic commonplace: if a human warrior can wield a sword like a flame, then a dragon can surely wield a flame like a sword.

To some extent, the creativity of the *Beowulf*-poet in forming compounds can likewise be seen simply with respect to those words based on words for ‘war’ or ‘battle’; such forms are certainly frequent within the poem, and the degree to which the poet seems at pains to vary his precise choice of words is simply staggering. In creating such compounds, the makes use of a number of elements, including the common simplexes *wig* (‘war’, ‘warfare’), *hild* (‘war’, ‘battle’), *guð* (‘war’, ‘battle’), and *beadu* (‘battle’, ‘fighting’), of which the last three words are only attested in verse, as well as the compounding element *heado-* (‘battle’, ‘war’), which is never found as a simplex, and is (apart from a handful of names) entirely restricted to verse. Yet from these five simple mainly poetic elements, the *Beowulf*-poet creates a huge variety of noun- and adjective-compounds, the great majority of which are not witnessed outside the poem in any surviving Old English texts. Such words, often termed *hapax legomena* (from the Greek; literally ‘those [words] which are said once’), were evidently an important part of the *Beowulf*-poet’s creative technique. A complete list of noun- and adjective compounds in *Beowulf* generated from these five compounding elements alone would run as follows (an asterisk indicates *hapax legomena*):


63 For a discussion of the word in context, see below, pp. 75–6; it it possible that poet deliberately chooses the word to refer ambiguously to either Unferth or his sword.

64 That the kenning ‘battle-flame’ for sword is part of the inherited Germanic poetic tradition seems attested by the existence of parallel compounds such as *gunnlogi* in Norse. Cf. Egilssson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, p. 209.

65 Some critics interpret the term *hapax legomena* (the singular form is *hapax legomenon*) strictly, and only employ it to refer to words attested only once in the extant corpus. Such a usage, while undoubtedy correct, would of course obscure a poet’s repeated use of his own unique coinage for literary effect. So, for example, Lucas, ed., *Exodus*, marks only those words unique in the corpus, while Irving, ed., *Exodus*, marks for particular interest those words which only appear in *Exodus*. Thus Irving highlights (for example) *meredæd* (*sea-death*: *Exodus*, lines 465a and 513b) and *sigerice* (*victory-realm*: *Exodus*, lines 27a and 563a), while Lucas does not.
That these five compounding elements should between them generate 103 distinct compounds in *Beowulf* is striking enough; that no fewer than seventy-five of those 103 compounds should be unattested outside the poem is surely some index of the *Beowulf*-poet’s creativity. Moreover, in producing these 103 compounds, the five initial elements combine with as many as seventy-eight different final elements, with relatively little overlap;\(^66\) by such raw measurements is the originality and ingenuity of the *Beowulf*-poet made plain.

Yet even as we celebrate and appreciate the sheer extent of the *Beowulf*-poet’s ‘word-hoard’, we should acknowledge that not all of the diction can be described as brilliant: the hard practicalities of alliterative composition also give rise to a significant number of tautologous compounds and phrases: while we may applaud the *Beowulf*-poet’s ingenuity, it is perhaps only the blinkered eye of faith that can see clear poetic merit in such compounds as *healærn* (line 78a) or *headreced* (lines 68a and [by emendation] 1981a),\(^67\) which although unique to *Beowulf* in the surviving corpus appear to mean merely ‘hall-hall’. One might perhaps find more to admire in the sheer creative range of ‘treasure-treasure’ compounds in *Beowulf*, including *hordmaðum* (line 1198a), *maþmgestreon* (line 1931a), *sincmaþum* (line 2193a), and *sincgestreon* (lines 1092b and 1226a).\(^68\) It would be dangerous, moreover, to dismiss entirely the creative possibilities of such apparently tautologous compounds: the term ‘wood-wood’ (*holtwudu*) is found at line 1369b to mean ‘forest’, but at line 2340a to mean ‘(wooden) shield’. At the very least, we can surely claim that even in his deployment of the basic principle of repetition, the usage of the *Beowulf*-poet is truly varied.

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\(^{66}\) Overlap occurs in the following cases: *guðbill*, *hildebill*, and *wigbill*; *hildebord* and *wigbord*; *heapbyrme* and *guðbyrme*; *guðcræft* and *wigcræft*; *headodeor* and *hildaðerb*; *guðfreca*, *hildejfreca*, and *wigfreca*; *hildfruma* and *wigfruma*; *guðgeatwa*, *hildegeatwa*, and *wiggetawa* (taking the second elements as identical); *beadolac* and *headoðað*; *beadoleom* and *hildoleoma*; *beadmecce* and *hildemece*; *guðræs*, *heathoræs*, and *hilleræs*; *beadurinc*, *guðrinc*, *healporinc*, and *hilderinc*; *beadurof*, *guðrof*, and *heathorof*; *beaduscearp* and *heathoscearp* (taking the second elements as identical; in fact the manuscript reads *headoscearde*); *hildeswat* and *heðuswat*; *gudgeweorc* and *heðoweorc* (taking the second elements as identical).

\(^{67}\) The manuscript originally read *reced* at line 1981a, with *side* added above the line by the B-scribe. But the line is short without *side*, and alliteratively defective with it, hence the emendation. For a spirited defence of the corrected manuscript-reading, both here and elsewhere in the text, see Kiernan, *‘Beowulf’ and the Beowulf Manuscript*, pp. 206–11.

\(^{68}\) A similarly tautologous phrase is ‘day-tally of days’ (*dogera dægrim*, line 823a); for a useful list of what he describes as *Doppelformen* (‘double forms’), see Berendsohn, *Zur Vorgeschichte des ‘Beowulf’*, pp. 186–7.
In producing such compounds, whether tautologous or not, the *Beowulf*-poet is effectively offering a number of snap-shots or perspectives both simultaneously and in sequence, and allowing the audience the chance to savour (or not) the multiplicity of meanings offered. This technique, commonly described as ‘variation’, is attested widely in surviving Old English verse, but its use has been noted (and studied) most fully in *Beowulf*. An extensive example of such variation occurs the first time that Wiglaf is introduced, when he is effectively characterised no fewer than five times in swift succession (lines 2602–5):

\[
\text{Wiglaf wæs haten Weoxstanes sunu, leoflic lindwiga, leod Scylfinga, meæg Ælfheres; geseah his mondryhten under heregriman hat þrowian.}
\]

[He was called Wiglaf, Weohstan’s son, a dear shield-warrior, a prince of the Scylfings, Ælfhere’s kinsman; he saw his lord suffering heat under the battle-helmet.]

Such a portentous introduction undoubtedly fits Wiglaf’s importance as a central figure in the last six hundred lines of the poem, but it is perhaps worth pausing to consider how much information is actually imparted here: this is the first time that Wiglaf, Weohstan, or Ælfhere have been mentioned at all, and the last-named is never mentioned again. A similarly impressive tally of epithets is used by Hrothgar, lamenting the death of his trusted companion Æschere at the hands of Grendel’s mother (lines 1323b–8a):

\[
\text{‘Dead is Æschere, Yrmenlafes yldra broþor, min runwita ond min rædbora, eaxlgestealla, þonne we on orlege hafelan weredon, þonne hniton feþan, eoferas cnysedan.’}
\]

[‘Æschere is dead, Yrmenlaf’s elder brother, my close confidant and my counsel-giver, my shoulder-companion when in battle we protected our heads as footsoldiers clashed, struck boar-helmets.’]

Again, we note that Ælfhere is characterised with respect to a figure who never appears in the poem again, before being described in three parallel terms (*runwita*, *rædbora*, and *eaxlgestealla*) that apparently link him with the ‘thought, word, and deed’ theme that is found elsewhere in the poem. As with

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69 See further below, pp. 240–56.
71 On the mysterious Yrmenlaf, see further below, p. 169.
72 See below, pp. 146, 218, and 255.
the introduction to Wiglaf, the sense is very much one of variation being used for purely rhetorical effect, to focus attention on a particular figure or scene.

In this context, one might consider what is evidently a set-piece description in the poem, as Beowulf’s sea-voyage to Denmark is carefully depicted (lines 210–28).\(^{73}\)

```
Fyrst forð gewat. Flota wæs on yðum,  
bat under beorge. Beornas gearwe  
on stefn stigon; streamas wundon,  
sund wið sande; secgas bærorn  
on bearn nacan beorhte fættewe,  
guðsearo geatolic; guman ut scufon,  
.weras on wilsið,  
Gewat þa ofer wægholm,  
flota famiheals fugle gelicost,  
oðhæt ymb antid  
wundenstefna gewaden hæfde  
þæt ða liðende land gesawon,  
brimclifu blican, beorgas steape,  
side sænæssas; þa wæs sund liden,  
eoletes æt ende. Þanon up hvaðe  
Wedera leode on wang stigon,  
sæwudu sældon (syrca hyrsedon,  
guðgewædo), gode þancedon  
þæs þe him yþlade eaðe wurdon.

[Time passed on; the vessel was on the waves, the boat beneath the headland. Warriors eagerly embarked by the prow – the tides eddied, the stream against the sand; the men bore into the bosom of the craft bright ornaments, splendid war-gear; the lads shoved out the braced timbers, men on a longed-for trip. Then there passed over the wavy sea, driven by the wind, the foamy-necked vessel, most like a bird, until in due time on the next day the braced prow had travelled so that the sailors saw land, sea cliffs glistening, steep headlands, broad promontories; then the passage was crossed, at the end of the watery way. From there swiftly the people of the Weder-Geats disembarked on land, made fast the sea-timbers – mail-coats rang, battle-dress; they gave thanks to God that their sea-voyage had been easy.]
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\(^{73}\) On this and a related passage later in the poem, see, for example, Ramsey, ‘The Sea Voyages in *Beowulf*’. Cf. Cook, ‘Beowulfian and Odyssean Voyages’; Fry, ‘Launching Ships in *Beowulf* 210–216 and *Brunanburh* 32b–36’; Greenfield, ‘*Beowulf* 207b–228: Narrative and Descriptive Art’.
All but one of the compounds in the preceding list are unique to Beowulf. The sound of sea against sand is surely imitated in the assonance of *wundon sund wið sande* (lines 212b–13a), and the same combination of sounds echo throughout the rest of the passage until the sea-voyage is over (*bundenne . . . winde . . . wundenstefna . . . liðende . . . land . . . sund . . . ende*). Another example of assonance (*beorge . . . beornas . . . beron . . . bearm . . . beorhte*) effectively delimits and characterises precisely those lines which deal with the preparations for the voyage (lines 211–14), and the poet underlines the integrity of these verses by providing four consecutive b-lines with exactly the same metre (*Beornas gearwe, streamas wundon, secgas bæron, and beorhte frætwe*). The voyage proper begins at line 216, indicated by the repetition of *gewat* (lines 210 and 216) and *flota* (lines 210 and 217) from the beginning of the passage, and the whole section ends at the disembarkation with a series of four consecutive b-lines ending with a third-person plural preterite verb (lines 225–8: *stigon . . . hrysedon . . . þancedon . . . wurdon*), and an example of paronomasia or wordplay (*yþ-/ eað-,* line 228). In such passages the poet’s careful craft is manifest.

Similarly close attention to phrasing at even the most apparently mundane parts of the poem demonstrate the high artistry that the Beowulf-poet is able to bring to bear. So, for example, before departing from Denmark after killing Grendel’s mother, Beowulf apparently hands back Hrunting (the sword which had failed him) to its owner, Unferth, in a manner described with great ceremony (lines 1807–12):77

Heht þa se hearda Hrunting beran
sunu Ecglafes, heht his sweord niman,
leoflic iren; sægde him þæs leanes þanc,
cwæð, he þone guðwine godne tealdæ,
wigæftigne, nales wordum log
meces ecge; þæt wæs modig secg.

[Then the hardened warrior ordered Hrunting to be carried to the son of Ecglaf, bid him take his sword, the precious blade; he said thanks to him for the loan, said that he reckoned it [or ‘him’] a good friend in conflict, strong in battle. In no way did he decry in words the weapon’s edge: that was a brave man.]

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74 See further the comments of Tolkien in Clark Hall, trans., Beowulf, pp. xxxviii–xlii. See too Evans, ‘The Sequence of Events in Beowulf’, ll. 207–16.
75 The exception is *sæness*, found twice in two separate Aldhelm-glossaries (Goossens, ed., The Old English Glosses of MS. Brussels, Royal Library 1650, no. 654; Napier, ed., Old English Glosses, 1.577), glossing Latin *promontorio* (alternatively spelt *promuncoriorio*).
76 On the artful use of repeated metre, see, for example, Scragg, ‘The Nature of Old English Verse’; cf. above, pp. 66–9.
77 Assuming that *leanes* (line 1809b) is a variant spelling of *lænes*. The alternative, favoured by (for example) Jack, Beowulf, p. 134, that here Unferth is presenting Hrunting (which has been quietly returned to him in the interim) to Beowulf seems somewhat strained, and requires *se hearda . . . sumu Ecglafes* to be read together; by contrast, *se hearda* is certainly used alone of Beowulf, at lines 401b and 1963a.
The formalism of this passage, with its anaphora (Heht . . . heht), near-rhyme (ecge . . . secg), and final closing formula (pæt wæs modig secg), certainly highlights the remarkable reconciliation that has taken place between Beowulf and his sometime detractor: the delicious ambiguity of whether it is Unferth or his sword that is reckoned by Beowulf a ‘good friend in conflict, strong in battle’ (guðwine godne . . . wиграстгнег, lines 1810–11) underlines Beowulf’s own generosity, since whilst he knows that both Unferth and Hrunting ultimately failed against Grendel and his mother, nonetheless they are not utterly disgraced. The blurring of the images of swords and men is beautifully encapsulated by the choice of the word secg (which the poet uses both to mean ‘man’, as here, and ‘sword’ [line 864a]), the pairing of swords and men across the caesura in line 1812, and (especially) the reinforcing soundplay in the same line (meces ecge . . . secg).

Wordplay and localised sound-effects are the Beowulf-poet’s stock-in-trade, and again emphasise the extent to which the poem is essentially aural in nature, and deserves to be heard. Again, even a relatively short transitional section of the poem, such as when he describes the end of the anonymous messenger’s speech to the Geats, predicting their dire fate, before they all travel to the headland to view their dead king and the dragon together (lines 3028–30a):

Swa se secg hwata seccgende wæs
laðra spella; he ne leag fela
wyrdæ ne wordæ. Weorod eall aras.
[‘Thus the brave man was speaking of hateful tidings; nor did he overstate the deeds or words. The whole troop rose.’]

Beginning with wordplay (secg . . . seccgende), continuing with a series of words apparently picked in part for their shared ending (hwata . . . laðra spella . . . fela wyrdæ ne wordæ), the poet focuses on one of his main themes, namely the difference between words and deeds, again through the mechanism of wordplay or paronomasia (wyrdæ ne wordæ weorod), as well as through the structure of the whole passage, which moves from one to the other. The final self-contained half-line of the passage is perhaps intended to recall other earlier such formulations, notably Werod eall aras (line 651b) and Duguð eal aras (line 1790b); in both cases, the phrase occurs (as here) immediately after a description of feasting. In this case, however, the feasting is not of humans, but on humans: the messenger has been describing the carnage that will be the lot of the hapless Geats. The second of these occurrences of the phrase occurs after

78 The most common related closing formula is of course ‘that was a good king’ (pæt wæs god cyning, lines 11b, 863b, and 2390b.
79 On the verbal conflict between Unferth and Beowulf, see below, pp. 246–55.
80 For the phrase meces ecge as a possible pun on mece secge, see below, pp. 185–6 and 240–1.
82 For a similar kind of wordplay in consecutive half-lines, compare (for example) gehyrde . . . hyrdæ (lines 609b–10a).
83 On the poet’s repeated interest on the difference between words and deeds, see below, pp. 204–37.
the end of Hrothgar’s sermon, when the poet simply offers a thumbnail sketch of a feast, apparently expecting his audience to fill in the blanks (as it were) based on his own previous descriptions (lines 1787–92a):

\[ \text{Þa wæs eft swa ær ellenrofum} \\
\text{fleetsittendum fægere gereorded} \\
iowan stefne. Nihthelm geswearc \\
deorc ofer dryhtguman. Duguð eal aras. \]

[Then again as before a feast was finely prepared for the courageous ones sitting in hall, on a new occasion. The shadow of night grew dark over the noble warriors; the whole troop arose. The grey-haired one, the aged Scylding, wanted to go to bed.]

It seems possible that the poet is punning here on two semantically related sets of homonyms: *gereordian*, ‘to prepare a feast’ (as in *fægere gereorded*, line 1788b), and *reord*, ‘speech’, ‘voice’ (as in line 2555a), *reordian*, ‘speak’, ‘talk’ (as in line 3025); *stefn*, ‘period’, ‘time’ (as in *niowan stefne*, line 1789a), and *stefn*, ‘voice’ (as in 2552b). If such a pun is accepted, the poet seems to be supporting the notion that after Hrothgar’s sombre speech there is a complete change of tone. The poet states that the feasting until Hrothgar goes to bed occurred ‘again as before’ (*Pa wæs eft swa ær*, line 1787a), and indeed the phrase itself occurs in a precisely similar situation, in the context of the initial feast of welcome that greets Beowulf’s arrival (*Pa wæs eft swa ær*, line 642a). Other similarities of diction and image between the latter two passages only confirm the parallel: in both cases there is gleeful celebration (*ðeod on sælum, sigefolca sweg*, lines 643b–44a; *fægere gereorded, niowan stefne*, lines 1788b–89a), before night falls (*nipende niht ofer ealle, / scaduhelma gesceapu scriðan cwoman*, lines 649–50; *Nihthelm geswearc, / deorc ofer dryhtguman*, lines 1789b–90a), when the assembled company arise (*Werod eall aras*, line 651b; *Duguð eal aras*, line 1790b), and Hrothgar goes to bed (*sunu Healfdenes secean wolde æfenreste*, line 646b; *Wolde blondenfeax beddes neosan, / gamela Scylding*, lines 1791–2a).

The poet apparently draws attention to the parallels between these two scenes of feasting only to emphasise the differences: in the first case the onset of night introduces the approach of Grendel; whilst here an evil outcome, though signalled, is averted. We are told that Beowulf slept ‘until a dark raven, glad-hearted, announced heaven’s joy’ (*opþæt hrefn blaca heofones wynne bliðheort bodode*, lines 1801–2a). The chiastic alliteration that links the ‘dark raven’ with its description as ‘glad-hearted’ is striking (*hrefn blaca . . . bliðheort*, lines 1801a and 1802a), and surely hints at artifice.\(^{84}\) The poet seems to be toying with the audience’s expectations of still more grief to come, as previ-
ously: after all, as the poet has already said himself: ‘Then there was after the feasting the commencement of weeping, a great sound in the morning’ (ða wæs aðer wiste wop up ahafen, micel morgensweg, lines 129–30a). Later in the poem the messenger of the Geats predicts a similarly ominous outcome (lines 3021b–7):

Forðon sceall gar wesan
monig morgenceald mundum bewunden,
hæfen on handa, nalles hearpan sweg
wigend weccesin, ac se wonna hrefn
fus ofer ðægum fela reordian,
earne seccan hu him æt æte speow,
þenden he wið wulf wæl reafode.

[For there shall be many a spear, cold with chill of morning, grasped in the fist, held in the hand: no sound of harp shall rouse the warrior, but the dark raven eager above the doomed shall say much, tell the eagle how things went at the feasting, when he plundered the slain with the wolf.]

Here again, just as before, ravens unequivocally betoken grief. Such a grim prospect does not, however, face the departing Beowulf, as he takes his leave of the Danes twelve hundred lines earlier: instead we see how the poet has subverted expectations through the clever use of verbal repetition as a device to associate quite disparate parts of his poem.

Parallels and echoes: incremental repetition and the envelope pattern

It will be clear from the above discussion that, as with alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and other sound-patterning, the Beowulf-poet uses the technique of repeating particular words and phrases both as a structural and as an ornamental device. Successive studies of the repetition of individual words within passages have underlined the extent to which the use of such ‘echo-words’ can help to ‘generate composition’, effectively aiding the poet in the making of his poem.85 But repeated words and phrases are also used to ‘bracket off’ discrete sections of the narrative into self-contained units. So, for example, Grendel’s advance on Heorot is delimited by a threefold repetition of the word com (‘he came’), as the monster approaches closer and closer, from out of the dark night, from off the moor, and right up to the building itself (Com on wanre niht... Da com of more... Com pa to recede);86 the term ‘incremental repetition’ has been coined to describe such an effect, which is widespread in medieval texts.87 Likewise,

86 For further discussion of this central scene, see further below, pp. 189–91.
87 See further n. 10 above.
the whole episode of Sigemund and Heromod (lines 867b–915) is bracketed off
by incremental repetition describing the warriors joyfully racing their horses
back from the monster-mere, happy in the belief that Grendel is dead (lines
864–7a and 916–17a):

Hwilum heaþorofe hleapan leton,
on geflit faran fealwe mearas
ðær him foldwegas ðægere þuhton,
cystum cuðe.

Hwilum flitende fealwe stræte
mearum maetan.

[At times the battle-brave ones let their pale horses gallop, contend in
races where the tracks seemed good to them, noted for fine qualities . . .
At times contending they raced with their horses along the pale paths.]

By contrast, the return of this triumphant party back to Heorot from the
monster-mere is marked by an ebullient speech from Hrothgar that immediately
follows, beginning and ending with parallel invocations to God in a clear enve-
lope pattern (lines 928–9b and 955b–6):

Ðisse ansyne Alwealdan þanc
lunge gelimpe!

. . .

Alwalda þec
gode forgylde, swa he nu gyt dyde!

[For this sight may thanks go immediately to the all-powerful . . . may
the all-powerful repay you with good, as done up till now.]

The beginning of the rest of Hrothgar’s speech is, moreover, chiefly notable for
ornamental alliteration on w-, which appears in six of the following nine lines
(lines 930b–939a):88

a mæg god wyrcan
wunder æfter wundre, wuldres hyrde.
þæt wæs ungeara þæt ic ænigra me
weana ne wende to widan feore
bote gebidan, þonne blode fah
husa selest heorodreorig stod,
wea widscofen witena gehwylcum
ðara þe ne wendon þæt hie wideferhð
leoda landgeweorc laðum beweredon
scuccum ond scinnum.

88 The manuscript reads gehwylcne at 936b, but cannot be so construed. Note how the alliteration in this
passage is supported by the repeated phrasing (ne wende . . . to widan feore, line 933; ne wendon . . .
þæt hie wideferhð, line 937), so aligning Hrothgar with his own wise counsellors. It is worth pointing
out that Beowulf’s reply is equally decorous: four out of six lines in his answer contain alliteration on
f- (lines 968–73).
[Ever may God work wonder after wonder, master of glory. It was only recently that I did not ever expect to experience any end to my woes, when the best of houses stood stained with blood, dripping with gore, an all-embracing woe for each of the wise men who never expected that they should defend the stronghold of the people from hostile demons and wicked spirits.]

Such a combination of aural effects, both structural and ornamental, within a relatively short space of text is testimony to the range of techniques available to the Beowulf-poet at any one time.

A further example of how the envelope-pattern can be used to mark off a set-piece scene comes in the poet’s account of Beowulf’s preparations to fight Grendel’s mother. Of all the elaborate descriptions in the poem, this arming-scene (which brings fitt XXI to an end) is perhaps closest in scale to what one finds in Classical epic (lines 1441b–1472):89

Gyrede hine Beowulf
eorlgwædum, nalles for ealdre mearn.
Scolde herebyrne hondum gebroden,
sid ond searofah, sund cunnian,
seo ðe bancofan beorgan cuþe,
þæt him hildegrap hreþre ne mihte,
eorres inwitfeng, aldre gesceþðan;
ac se hwita helm hafelan werede,
se þe meregrundas mengan scolde,
secan sundgeblanda since geweorðad,
befongen freawrasnum, swa hine fyrdagum
worhtæ wæpna smið, wundrum teode,
besette swinlicum, þæt hine syððan no
brond ne beadomecas bitan ne meahton.
Næs þæt þonne mægenfultuma
þæt him on ðearfe lah ðyle Hroøgares;
wæs þæm hæfte mec Hrunting nama.
þæt wæs an foran ealdgestreona;
ecg wæs iren, atertanum fah,
ahyrred heaposwate; næfræ hit æt hilde ne swac
manna ængum para þe hit mid mundum bewand,
se ðe gryresiðas gegan dorste,
folcstede fara; næs þæt forma sið
þæt hit ellenweorc ðefnan scolde.
Huru ne gemunde mago Ecglafes,
eaføyes craëftig, þæt he ær gespræc
wine druncen, þa he þæs wæynes onlah
selran sweordfrecan. Selfa ne dorste
under yða gewin aldre geneþan,
drihtscype dreogan; þær he dome forleas,

89 On the relationship of such self-contained sequences to the fitt-structure of the poem, see below, pp. 91–7.
Beowulf dressed himself in warrior’s garb; he did not care for his life. The war-corselet, woven by hand, broad and cunningly decorated, had to test the water, the one that was able to protect his body so that hostile grasp, the wicked grip of an angry foe should not harm his heart, his life; but the bright helmet, which had to mingle with the bottom of the mere, seek the surging water, guarded his head, adorned with gold, encircled with lordly bands, just as in ancient days a weapon-smith had made it, formed it marvellously, set it round with boar-images, so that afterwards no sword or battle-blade could bite it. That was not the least of powerful aids that Hrothgar’s *þyle* lent him in his need: the name of that hilted sword was Hrunting; that was one of the foremost of ancient treasures: its edge was iron, gleaming with venom-twigs, hardened by battle-blood; it had never failed in battle any man who grasped it in his hand, who dared enter on dangerous deeds, the meeting-place of foes; that was not the first time that it had to perform a courageous act. Indeed, the son of Ecglaf, mighty in strength, did not recall what he had previously said, drunk with wine, when he lent that weapon to a better swordsman. He himself did not dare to risk his life under the turmoil of the waves, perform a heroic deed; for that he lost his glory, his fame for courage. It was not so for the other man, once he had dressed himself for battle.

The whole description is enclosed in an envelope-pattern (*Gyrede . . . gegyred*), and begins with an approving glance at Beowulf’s insouciance – ‘he did not care for his life’ (*nalles for ealdre mearn*, line 1442b) – that the poet is shortly to connect with great deeds of derring-do (lines 1534b–1536, emphasis added):

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Swa sceal man don, 1535
þonne he æt guðe  ðenceð
longsumne lof,  na ymb his lif cearað.
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[So must a man do when he thinks to gain in battle long-lasting fame: he will have no care for his life.]

In his description of Beowulf’s preparations for the fight, the poet focuses carefully in turn on his mail-coat (lines 1443–7), his helmet (lines 1448–54), and his (borrowed) sword (lines 1455–64). As commonly in such epic lists of three, attention is focused on the first and last items, namely the mailcoat, which plays a crucial role in getting Beowulf to the bottom of the mere, and on the sword, which becomes a focal point in the actual conflict. The increasing length of the descriptions of the three items again underlines the importance of the sword, and highlights the role played by its lender, Unferth; in a characteristically loaded echo, the poet stresses that he himself did not dare ‘to risk his life under the turmoil of the waves’ (*under yða gewin aldre geneþpan*, line 1469), so evidently recalling Unferth’s earlier taunt to Beowulf about the time when he

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90 Cf. the discussion of Clark, ‘Beowulf’s Armor’; McGuinness, ‘Beowulf’s Byrnyes’.

91 On Unferth’s wider role in the poem, see below, pp. 246–56.
and Breca ‘risked their lives’ on the waves (on deop weter aldrum neðdon, lines 509b–510a; on garsecg . . . aldrum neðdon, lines 537b–538a). Here, as before, the poet is at pains to establish associations between widely separated scenes in the poem through verbal repetition, so providing a complex series of cross-references within the text.

It should be stressed, however, that although verbal parallels and verbatim repetition play a key role in the structuring of the text, parallels of meaning or theme could be employed in the same way. So, for example, during Beowulf’s fight with Grendel, the perception of the terrified Danes in the hall, onlookers in a battle in which they cannot play a useful part, is depicted in another brief passage marked off by a clear envelope pattern in which, however, none of the key words actually recurs (lines 767–70):92

Dryhtsele dynede; Denum eallum wearð, ceasterbuendum, cenra gehwylcum, eorlum ealuscerwen. Yrre wæron begen, reþe renweardas. Reced hlynsode. 770

[The noble hall resounded; there was for all the Danes, for the fortress-dwellers, for each of the bold ones, for the warriors, great terror. Both were enraged, the angry hall-guardians: the building crashed.]

The ferocity of the combatants is emphasised, as is their essential identity: to the onlooking Danes both Beowulf and and Grendel are ‘hall-guardians’, and both the cause of the ‘great terror’ they feel. The problematic nature of the term ealuscerwen has long puzzled scholars, and the closely-varied fourfold dative description of the onlookers (Denum eallum . . . ceasterbuendum . . . cenra gehwylcum . . . eorlum) presents such a delayed build-up to its deployment as to suggest that it was something of a trump-card that the poet was playing.93 A broad parallel to the construction (and, surely, to the general scene) is offered by the later discovery by the Danes of the head of Æschere by the monster-mere (lines 1417b–1421):94

Denum eallum wæs, winum Scyldinga, weorce on mode to geholianne, ðegne monegum,

93 Discussion of the term usually centres around the appearance of a similar term in Andreas; see further below, pp. 163–6. A characteristically clear-sighted analysis of the difficulties of interpretation is offered by Mitchell, ‘Literary Lapses: Six Notes on Beowulf and Its Critics’, pp. 4–7. For attempts to explain the term by reference to sources in Latin, Welsh, and Norse, see, for example, Heinemann, ‘Ealuscerwen-Meoduscerwen, the Cup of Death and Baldrs Draumar’; Rowland, ‘OE ealuscerwen/meoduscerwen and the Concept of “Paying for Mead”’.
94 One might also note that the description of the finding of Æschere’s head occurs almost parenthetically between two accounts of the bloody and turbid water of the mere: we are told that ‘the water stood beneath, gory and disturbed’ (weter under stod, dreorig ond gedrefed, lines 1416b–17a), and (with rhyme and assonance) that ‘the swell seethed with blood . . . with hot gore’ (flod blode weol . . . hatan heolfre, lines 1422a–1423a); by providing such a background to the grim discovery, the poet has brilliantly contextualised this gory scene.
oncyð eorla gehwæm, syðþan Æscheres
[For all the Danes, the friends of the Scyldings, there was grief to suffer in the heart, for many a thegn, sorrow for each of the warriors, once they came across Æscheres head on the sea-cliff.]

Here again a fourfold dative construction (Denum eallum . . . winum Scyldinga . . . degne monegum . . . eorla gehweem) is used to delay the revelation of the dread discovery of Æschere’s head. At all events, the base-meaning ‘terror’ for ealuscerwen seems sanctioned by a further parallel dative construction, again in a passage describing the reaction of the Danes to the unearthly din made by Grendel (lines 782b–790):

Sweg up astag
niwe geneahhe; Norðdenum stod
atelic egesa, anra gehwylicum
þara þe of wealle wop gehyrdon,
gryreleoð galan godes ondsacan,
sigeleasne sang, sar wanigean
helle hæfton. Heold hine fieste
785
se þe manna wæs mægene strengest
on þæm dæge þysses lifes.

[A sound rose up, wholly without parallel; for the North-Danes there arose a dread terror, for every single one of those who heard the cry from the outer wall, God’s adversary chanting a terrible lay, a song without victory, hell’s captive bemoaning his wound. There held him fast the one who was the strongest in might of men on that day of this life.]

In this case, the phrase atelic egesa (‘dread terror’, line 784a) does duty for the puzzling term ealuscerwen in a parallel syntactical structure just a few lines before; the association seems inescapable, just as the wholesale repetition here of the characterisation of Beowulf as ‘the one who was the strongest in might of men on that day of this life’ (se þe manna wæs mægene strengest / on þæm dæge þysses lifes, lines 789–90) seems consciously to recall the earlier description of him on strikingly similar terms (se wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest / on þæm dæge þysses lifes, lines 196–7).95

Other parallels of diction and scene are used to associate characters and create links between apparently disparate scenes, so lending structure to the whole. So, for example, the second time that Hygd is mentioned in the poem, bustling around the hall serving drinks (lines 1980b–1983a), she is described as ‘Hæreth’s daughter’ (Hæreðes dohtor; line 1981b), just as she had been when first described (line 1929a). After a brief enquiry from Hygelac, Beowulf launches into one of the longest speeches in the poem (lines 2000–151), mentioning first his victory over Grendel, before describing his reception at Heorot (lines 2014–31):

95 See further above, p. 55.
‘Weorod wæs on wynne; ne seah ic widan feorh
under heofones hwealf healsittendra 2015
medudream maran. Hwilum mæru cwen,
frīðusibb folca, flet eall geondhwærf;
bædde byre geonge; oft hio beahwiðan
secge sealde, ær hie to setle geong.
Hwilum for duguðe dohtor Hroðgares2020
eorlum on ende ealuwæge bær;
þa ic Freaware fletsittende
nemnan hyrde, þær hio nægled sinc
hæleðum sealde. Sio gehaten is,
geong, goldhroden, gladum suna Frodan;
hafað þæs geworden wine Scyldinga,
rices hyrde ond þæt ræd talað,
þæt he mid ðy wife wælfæhða dæl,
sæcca gesette. Oft seldan hwær
æfter leodhryre lytle hwile2030
bongar bugeð, þeah seo bryd duge.’

[‘The company was joyful: I never saw under the vault of the sky greater
mead-pleasure for those sitting in a hall. At times the renowned queen,
the peace-pledge of nations, passed right around the hall, urged on the
young men, often she gave a man a twisted circlet, before she went to
her seat; at times before the experienced warriors Hrothgar’s daughter
carried the ale-cup to the warriors in turn, and I heard those sitting in the
hall name her Freawaru, as she gave the precious vessel to the warriors.
Young and gold-adorned, she is promised to Froda’s gracious son; the
lord of the Scyldings, the guardian of his people, has brought it about
(and reckons it a wise policy) that he should settle a great number of
conflicts, murderous feuds, with that woman. The killing-spear seldom
stays idle anywhere after a man dies, although the bride is fine.’]

Once again, ominous words, here in the form of a gnomic utterance, bring a
passage of praise to a close. There has been no previous mention of Freawaru,
nor of the joint role she plays in Heorot serving the men:96 here it would appear
that while Wealhtewow serves the younger warriors, Freawaru does parallel
service (Hwilum . . . Hwilum, lines 2016b and 2020a) for the tried and tested
men. Like her mother, a celebrated ‘peace-pledge of nations’ (frīðusibb folca,
lne 2017a), Freawaru is to be sent abroad to cement an uneasy accord after a
period of strife. This episode, coming hard on the heels of the accounts of Hygd
(who serves drink in the same way, lines 1980b–1983a) and Thryth, suggests
careful patterning on the part of the poet, who has thereby effected a contrast
between accounts in Denmark of three mature matrons mindful of their sons
(Wealhtewow, Hildeburh, and Grendel’s mother), and those in the land of the
Geats of three young princesses married off abroad (Hygd, Freawaru, and
Thryth).97

The extent to which the poet of Beowulf uses repetition at the sub-verbal,

96 For other differences, see below, pp. 184 and 242–4.
97 On the structural role of women in the poem, see further below, p. 148.
verbal, and phrasal levels of diction is abundantly clear from the passages already cited; little wonder, then, that such a formulaic technique should have come under close scrutiny by generations of scholars attempting to characterise the art and craft of the *Beowulf*-poet, who seems especially adept among composers of extant Old English verse at bringing what appear to be aspects of an original and individual style to a common inherited tradition.

Repeted words and formulaic phrasing

*Beowulf* has long been characterised as a poem largely composed of repeated phrases: as early as 1898 Richard Kistenmacher attempted the systematic collection of such formulaic phrases,98 and it is interesting to see the extent to which his work anticipates that of Robert Creed,99 working nearly sixty years later and filled with the zeal of oral-formulaic theory, which had only first been applied to *Beowulf* a few years before.100 Since then there has been a veritable frenzy of activity initially designed to demonstrate that *Beowulf* was not simply formulaic, but oral,101 with a welter of counter-arguments seeking to show that not only were literate Anglo-Saxons perfectly capable of formulaic composition in Old English verse, but that in some instances they were equally prone to formulaic composition in Old English prose, in Anglo-Latin verse, and even in

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98 Kistenmacher, *Die wörtlichen Wiederholungen im Bêowulf*. For other attempts to catalogue so-called *Parallelstellen* in *Beowulf*, see above, p. 2.
99 Creed, ‘Studies in the Techniques of Composition’, remains the most comprehensive attempt to date to record formulaic repetition in *Beowulf*.
100 The seminal article is that by Magoun, ‘The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry’.
Anglo-Latin prose. The focus of enquiry has now shifted somewhat away from an insistence on the orality of formulaic composition, and instead onto the originality and artistry of the individual authors who chose to produce using traditional techniques of composition, transmission, and performance.

The extent to which the diction of *Beowulf* can be described as formulaic can to some degree be traced through Appendixes II and III below, which together chart formulaic repetition in around 40 per cent of the lines in the poem. In fact, however, relatively few self-contained lines in the poem are recycled verbatim: such repetition accounts for less than 1 per cent of the lines in *Beowulf*. Such a figure is substantially smaller than that found in other formulaic texts routinely compared with *Beowulf*; after an analysis of the first 3,182 lines of the *Iliad*, for example, William Whallon concludes that *Beowulf* is ‘less than a third as formulaic’. Moreover, nearly half of these whole-verse repetitions comprise three simple parallel statements: ‘Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow’ (*Beowulf mapelode, bearn Ecgþeowes*, first appearing at line 529); ‘Hrothgar spoke, protector of the Scyldings’ (*Hroðgar mapelode, helm Scyldinga*, first appearing at line 371); ‘Wiglaf spoke, son of Weohstan’ (*Wiglaf maþelode Weohstanes sunu*, first appearing at line 2862).

Much more common are those lines in *Beowulf* where a whole line is confected from two half-lines found verbatim elsewhere in the poem; so, for example, the notion that folk travelled ‘throughout far distances to view the wonder’ of Grendel’s tracks (*geond widwegas wundor sceawian*, line 840) is not repeated precisely elsewhere in the poem, though both its constituent half-lines are: line 840a appears verbatim as line 1704a, when Hrothgar extols the fame of Beowulf ‘throughout far distances’, and line 840b is repeated as line 3032b, when the sorry Geats go ‘to view the wonder’ of the dead Beowulf and the

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102 For a sustained argument against applying the original assumptions of oral-formulaic theory to Old English poetry, see Watts, *The Lyre and the Harp*; the notion that literate Anglo-Saxons could likewise compose formulaic Old English verse was first demonstrated by Benson, ‘The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry’. Studies which seek to extend the parameters of the debate into other areas of Anglo-Saxon composition include Lapidge, ‘Aldhelm’s Latin Poetry and Old English Verse’; Orchard, ‘Crying Wolf: Oral Style and the *Sermones Lupi*’; *idem*, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, pp. 73–125; *idem*, ‘Old Sources, New Resources: Finding the Right Formula for Boniface’; *idem*, ‘Both Style and Substance: the Case for Cynewulf’.

103 See, for example, the comments of the most prolific and influential writer of oral-traditional literature, John Miles Foley, writing at the beginning of the first chapter of his latest book, significantly entitled Homer’s *Traditional Art* (p. 13): ‘This volume focusses on the roots of Homeric epic in an ancient Greek oral tradition, exploring Homeric art not as a literary triumph over that heritage but as the direct product of its unique, empowering agency. That is, it considers how the bard and his tradition employed a dedicated medium for expression to achieve a more than literary art.’ One might well argue that, *mutatis mutandis*, the time is ripe for an analysis of the traditional art of *Beowulf*.

104 In the analysis that follows, I have made extensive use of both Appendixes, to which reference should be made for verification and full texts of the lines cited.

105 Whole-verse repetition occurs at lines 75 and 1771; 197, 790, and 806; 371, 456, and 1321; 500 and 1166a; 529, 631, 957, 1383, 1473, 1651, 1817, 1999, and 2425; 1271 and 2182; 1685 and 1956; 2052 and 3005; 1646 and 1816; 2862 and 3076. Repetition that carries over a single line occurs at lines 133–4 and 191–2; 196–7 and 789–90; 200–1 and 1597–8; 302–3 and 1917–18; 416–17 and 1591–2; 672–3 and 1696–7; 796–7 and 2655–6; 946–7 and 1758–9; 949–50 and 660; 1046–7 and 3141–2; 1052–3 and 1902–3; 1386–7 and 2342–3; 1484–5; 1684–6 and 2382–3; 2335–6 and 3036–7; 2350–1 and 2543–4; 2918–19 and 2974–5.

106 Whallon, *Formula, Character, and Context*, p. 82.

107 Compare Table IV below, pp. 206–7.
dragon together.\textsuperscript{108} Outside \textit{Beowulf}, the phrase \textit{wundor sceawian} is not found in extant poetry, but by contrast \textit{geond widwegas} occurs twice.\textsuperscript{109} Likewise, both elements of a line describing how at the death of Hygelac ‘worse war-fighters plundered the slain’ (\textit{wyrsan wigfrecan wel reafodon}, line 1212) recur elsewhere: \textit{Beowulf} boasts how Hygelac had no need to seek out ‘worse war-fighters’ while he was alive (line 2496a), while the messenger of the Geats gloomily predicts how in times to come, the beasts of battle will talk among themselves, and the raven will tell the eagle what good feasting he had when he ‘plundered’ the slain with the wolf (\textit{wel reafode}, line 3027b).\textsuperscript{110} Several other lines in \textit{Beowulf} are repeated piecemeal in this way.\textsuperscript{111}

At the level of the half-line, of course, verbatim repetition is commensurately still more common,\textsuperscript{112} and the real flexibility of the formulaic technique of composition employed by the \textit{Beowulf}-poet becomes clear. In several cases, the poet is able to repeat formulas (and double their alliterative potential) by simply reversing the constituent elements: if he can say of the retainers of Scyld Seafing, sending their lord back into the unknown that ‘their spirit was sad’ (\textit{him wæs geomor sefa}, line 49b), he can say the same of the brooding \textit{Beowulf}, waiting to fight the dragon (\textit{him wæs geomor sefa}, line 2419b), but vary the elements when describing Wiglaf, pondering his lord’s solitary lot (\textit{him wæs sefa geomor}, line 2632). A ‘famous prince’ can be called either a \textit{mære þeoden} (lines 129b, 201a, 345a, 797a, 1046b, 1598a, 1715a, 1992a, 2384a, 2572a, 2788b, and 3141b) or (should alliteration demand it) a \textit{þeoden mære} (lines 353a and 2721a); Hrothgar, ‘son of Healfdene’, can be described as both \textit{sumu Healfdenes} (lines 268a, 344b, 645a, and 1040b) and \textit{Healfdenes sumu} (line 1009b); Wiglaf, ‘son of Weohstan’, can be both \textit{sunu Wihtstanes} (lines 2752b and 3120b) and \textit{Wihtstanes sunu} (lines 2862b and 3076b); and even ‘dear \textit{Beowulf}’ himself can be both \textit{Beowulf leofa} (lines 1216b and 1758b) and \textit{leofa Beowulf} (1854b, 1987b, and 2663a).\textsuperscript{113}

The flexibility of the formulaic system becomes still more apparent when it is realised that synonyms and even metrical equivalents can be freely substi-

\textsuperscript{108} In fact, line 3032b is written as \textit{wundor sceawian}, so displaying scribe B’s characteristic spelling of the form; on the customary collocation of the words \textit{wund[or]} and \textit{sceaw}-\textit{in} the \textit{Beowulf}-manuscript, see above, pp. 27–9.

\textsuperscript{109} At \textit{Christ II}, line 482, and in the \textit{Paris Psalter}, 144.20, line 4.

\textsuperscript{110} On the so-called ‘beasts of battle motif’, especially as it appears in \textit{Beowulf}, see, for example, Bonjour, ‘Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle’; Griffith, ‘Convention and Originality in the Old English “Beasts of Battle” Typescene’; Magoun, ‘The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry’.

\textsuperscript{111} See, for example, the entries in Appendix II below under lines 35, 150, 227, 232, 268, 289, 383, 427, 512, 561, 1245, 1307, 1311, 1327, 1381, and 1646; other examples can, of course, be easily found.

\textsuperscript{112} For instances of repetition restricted to individual half-lines within the first fifty lines of \textit{Beowulf} alone, see, for example, the entries in Appendix II below under lines 6, 9, 11, 16, 17, 29, 30, 32, 34, 40, 41, 44, 45, 46, 47, and 50.

\textsuperscript{113} There are a host of similar examples: cf. \textit{sweotolan tacne} (line 141b) and \textit{tacen sweotol} (line 833b); \textit{feond mancynnes} (line 164b) and \textit{mancynnes feond} (line 1276a); \textit{Deniga leodum} (lines 389a, 696a, 1323a, 1712b, and 2125b) and \textit{leode Deniga} (line 599a); \textit{leode mine} (lines 415b, 1336b, and 1345b) and \textit{minum leodum} (lines 2797b and 2804b); \textit{feorran ond nean} (line 839b) and \textit{nean ond feorran} (lines 1174a and 2317b); \textit{het hine wel brucan} (line 1045b) and \textit{het hyne brucan well} (line 2812b); \textit{fa wæs frod cyning} (line 1306b) and \textit{wæs da frod cyning} (line 2209b); \textit{Geata dryhten} (lines 1484b, 1831a, 2483a, 2560b, 2576a, and 2991b) and \textit{dryhten Geata} (lines 2402a and 2901a).
tuted. So, for example, a ‘band of men’ can be described as æþelinga gedriht (line 118b), eorla gedriht (lines 357b and 431b), seega gedriht (lines 633b and 1672b), or helælpæ gedryht (line 662a); one can ‘risk [one’s] life’ in various ways (feore gedigde, line 578b; aldre gedigest, line 661b; ealdre gedigde, line 1655b); when a ‘whole troop arose’ on different occasions, it could be described in different ways (werord eall aras, line 651b; duguð eal aras, line 1790b; weorod eall aras, line 3030b); the notions that ‘soonest is best’, ‘battle is impending’, or ‘flame must consume’ can each be depicted by two distinct but clearly related phrases (ofost is selest, line 256b, and nu is ofost betost, line 3007b; hild onsaeg, line 2076b, and guð onsaeg, line 2483b; pa sceall brond fretan, line 3014b, and nu sceal gled fretan, line 3114b); and ‘grief’ or ‘strife’ can be ‘renewed’ in three quite different ways (cearu wæs geniwod, line 1303b; sorh is geniwod, line 1322b; wroht was geniwod, line 2287b). Nor was the simple substitution of synonyms the only option: metrically equivalent words and phrases would work just as well. If something could be said to be ‘most like a bird’ (fugle gelicost, line 218b), something else could be ‘most like flame’ or ‘steel’ or ‘ice’ (ligge gelicost, line 727a; style gelicost, line 985b; ise gelicost, line 1608b); if something could be ‘urged on by wind’ (winde gefysed, line 217b), something else might be ‘urged on by war’ or ‘fire’ or even ‘its own heart’ (guþe gefysed, line 630b; fyre gefysed, line 2309a; heorte gefysed, line 2561b). The formulaic world of Beowulf is a world of delicious linguistic possibilities: one can be drunk on ‘wine’ or ‘beer’, be mindful of ‘noble things’, ‘songs’, ‘gifts’, ‘glories’, ‘miseries’, ‘pleasures’, or ‘feuds’, die of ‘mortal wounds’ or ‘wounds inflicted by a sax’, and still ‘not shrink back at all’ from either ‘life’ or ‘the feud’.

The substitution of metrically equivalent words or phrases, moreover, further permits the use of quite different parts of speech within the same formulaic system. So, for example, there are no fewer than five half-lines of precisely the same form ‘X under clouds’ scattered throughout the poem, and employing verbs, nouns, and adjectives, as necessary: Scyld Scefing ‘grew under clouds’ (weox under wolcnum, line 8a), Grendel ‘strode under clouds’ (wod under wolcnum, line 714a), and Hrothgar ‘ruled under clouds’ (weold under wolcnum, line 1770a); the shadows of night passed ‘dark under clouds’ (wan under wolcnum, line 651a); and likewise there darkened in Grendel’s mere the ‘water under the clouds’ (wæter under wolcnum, line 1770a). Such freedom allows the possibility of what Rand Hutcheson, who has produced the fullest list of such formulaic metrical verse-types to date, calls ‘interlocking formula[s]:

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114 Cf. above, pp. 76–7.
115 Cf. beore druncne, line 480; beore druncen, line 531a; wine druncen, line 1467a.
116 cf. cynna gemyndig, line 613b; gidda gemyndig, line 868b; geofena gemyndig, line 1173b; marða gemyndig, line 1530a; bealewa gemyndig, line 2082b; hropra gemyndig, line 2171b; fæhða gemyndig, line 2689b.
117 Cf. feorhbennum seoc, line 2740a and sexbennum seoc, line 2904a.
118 Cf. nalles for ealdre mearn, line 1442b and nalles for fæhðe mearn, line 1537b.
119 The notion of formulaic systems, especially within Beowulf, is explored most fully by Fry, ‘Old English Formulas and Systems’; Niles, ‘Formula and Formulaic System in Beowulf’; Riedinger, ‘The Old English Formula in Context’.
120 Cf. the discussion by Liuzza, trans., Beowulf: a New Verse Translation, p. 22.
verses representing formula[s] that share a common element with a third verse. While on the surface, only identity of metre would seem to associate the two half-lines weorðmyndum þah (‘he threw with honours’, line 8b) and beotwordum spræc (‘he spoke with boasting words’, line 2510b), outside Beowulf the existence of an apparently connected set beotwordum spræc (Juliana, line 185a) / hosþwordum spræc (Juliana, line 189b) / gyþþwordum spræc (Battle of Maldon, line 274b) / wurðmyndum spræc (Exodus, line 258b) seems to bridge that gap.

Such extraordinary flexibility within the interconnected systems of formulas available to a creative poet such as that of Beowulf makes the appeal to identical formulaic phrasing in the conjectural emendation of apparent gaps or flaws in the transmitted text a more problematic procedure than perhaps has been acknowledged to date. Although formulaic phrasing certainly seems useful in restoring a number of readings now lost either through physical damage to the manuscript, or through obvious scribal errors of one sort or another, there are other cases where it seems at least possible that the poet was deliberately varying his use of formulas for local effect. It seems relatively safe, for example, to add the word æþeling to existing ærgod in line 1329a, on the grounds that the phrase æþeling ærgod (‘prince good of old’) is witnessed in the manuscript at lines 130a and 2342a, and both sense and metre seem to require something; likewise, it seems appropriate to add the word wen on the grounds of alliteration, sense, and metre to the otherwise defective phrase ðæs ðe ic hafo in line 3000b, on the model of the parallel phrase þæs ic wen hæbbe (‘as I expect’) in line 383b. But it seems easier to account for the omission of the element grund- (‘ground’) through eyeskip in line 2139, which in the manuscript has a light and non-alliterating a-line (in ðam sele Grendel’s modor [‘in the hall of Grendel’s mother’]), than to restore the (otherwise perfectly acceptable) phrase in ðam guðsele (‘in the war-hall’) on the basis of line 443a (in þæm guðsele). Similarly, the omission through eyeskip of an infinitive after hafelan in line 1372b makes more sense if the word helan is restored, rather than the synonymous hydan that

121 Hutcheson, *Old English Poetic Metre*, pp. 303–16; the definition is given at p. 303.
122 For the possibility of a more direct connection between these texts, see below, pp. 163–8.
123 See above, pp. 44–56.
124 A number of cases are highlighted in Appendix II below; see particularly, for example, the restoration of seþen gyldenne (for manuscript seþen g . . . denne) at line 47b, on the model of seþen gyldenne in line 1021a; the restoration of swa hit gedefe bið (for manuscript swa hit gd . . .) at line 3174b on the model of swa hit gedefe wes in lines 561b and 1670b; the restoration of maerd gaðumonde (for manuscript m . . . gemunde) at line 2678a on the model of gemyne maerþo in line 659a and maerþa gemyndig in 1530a. Other examples are found in lines 723b, 762b, 2146b, 2220b, and 2727a.
125 So, for example, it seems clear that line 148a should read wine Scyldinga (whereas the manuscript reads wine Scyldenda) on the model of lines 30b, 170b, 1183a, 1418a, 2026b, and 2101b; likewise, the manuscript-reading sele ædende at line 51b represents a common scribal error: most editors restore selevedende on the model of line 1346a; the apparent dittography of ðe gefremedon on line 2478b can be restored to of gefremedon on the model of of gefremedon in line 165b; at line 465b the manuscript reads folce deninga for folce Deniga, presumably because the scribe has been influenced by the preceding Arscyldinga; cf. folces Denigea at line 1582a. Other examples of unusual or impossible scribal spellings that can apparently be restored on the basis of formulaic phrasing are found at lines 302a, 581a, 652a, 1278b, 1333a, 1599b, 1833a, 1918a, 2225b, 2325b, 2596b, 2793a, 2814b, 2946b, and 3060a.
the appearance of the phrase *hafelan hydan* (‘to hide [the] head’) in line 446a might suggest.  

It is tempting to emend one or other of the phrases *ecgum dyhtig* (line 1287a) and *ecgum pyhtig* (line 1558b), to make them match, but although such an emendation is easily defensible on the grounds that the scribes commonly confuse *d* and *þ*, both forms seem possible, and the meaning (‘strong in edge’) in both cases is essentially the same; ditto with the phrases *hringa þengel* (line 1507a) and *hringa fengel* (line 2345b): both mean ‘prince of rings’.  

Still other common editorial choices simply seem baffling when viewed in a formulaic context: the first two words of the phrase *ac se æglæca* in line 159a have long been lost due to a gap at the edge of the manuscript, but have nonetheless somehow become fixed in the editorial tradition of the poem despite the existence of the formulaic phrase *atol æglæca* (‘awesome dread assailant’) at lines 592a, 732a, and 816a. And just as Unferth long ago in the editorial tradition of *Beowulf* lost the initial *H* that begins his name on all four occasions that it appears (at lines 499a, 530b, 1165b, and 1488a), so too editors commonly emend to *ondslyht* (‘onslaught’, ‘counterblow’) the manuscript reading *hond slyht* (‘hand-slaughter’, ‘hand-blow’) on both occasions that the word occurs in a clearly formulaic context (at lines 2929b and 2972b). Moreover, editors of *Beowulf* may not be the only ones to have been affected by the formulaic language of the text; Katherine O’Brien O’Keefe has shown how scribes commonly substituted one formula for another in copying, and such a process may help to explain how the entire line *æfter hæleða hryre hwate Scyldingas* (‘after the fall of heroes, the brave Scyldings’) can appear in context as line 2052 and again, bizarrely, as line 3005; as Klaeber puts it: ‘the line as it stands in the [manuscript] has the air of an intruder’, and various imaginative attempts to defend the manuscript-reading seem unconvincing.

But if the fact of formulaic verbal repetition in *Beowulf* is undeniable, there is still discussion as to its precise significance, and whether what at one level can simply be seen as a useful inherited compositional technique has any wider purpose in associating scenes, characters, and themes. We have already seen how the *Beowulf*-poet uses the repetition and variation of sounds, words, and phrases frequently to lend both structure and texture to his text; but it can be seen time and again how repetition at other levels of discourse strongly supports
the notion that the *Beowulf*-poet also uses patterns of repeated and deliberately varied themes and scenes to provide the opportunity for his audience to make other, broader connections between disparate elements in the text. In short, it is the basic elements of *Beowulf*'s style (namely repetition and variation, together the products of apposition) that give the poem its basic structure.

**Repetitions of theme and scene: the fitt-divisions and the wider structure**

Scholarly debate on the structure of *Beowulf* has been extensive (and occasionally acrimonious) for years.\(^{134}\) Even granted the grudging critical acceptance of the essential unity of the poem that survives,\(^{135}\) the older notions of the text as simply focusing on the one hand on the three monster-fights, or on the other on the periods of Beowulf's youth and age, have slowly given way to suggestions that the patterning within the poem is much more complex and interwoven that even that stark bipartite or tripartite choice might imply.\(^{136}\) The year 1967 saw two important contributions to the debate, with John Leyerle developing his earlier notion of the poem as based on the same interlace-pattern as found widely in Insular art, and Eamonn Carrigan proposing a highly involved mathematical structure based on the numbered sections in the manuscript;\(^{137}\) more recent contributions, by Thomas Elwood Hart and David Howlett, have been still more ingenious and complex.\(^{138}\) As with so many aspects of the poem, both visual and aural patterns have been invoked in the search for the structure and meaning of *Beowulf*.

With regard to its larger structure, the very fact that *Beowulf* begins and ends

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\(^{135}\) On the notion that the poem was originally composed of a number of self-contained lays, amalgamated by a later poet or poets (so-called *Liedertheorie*), see above, pp. 6–7.

\(^{136}\) An excellent general account of the history of the debate is given by Shippey, "Structure and Unity".

\(^{137}\) Carrigan, "Structure and Thematic Development in *Beowulf*"; Leyerle, "The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*".

with a funeral certainly lends to the poem as a whole the same envelope-patterning that can be seen to operate at lower levels of the text; nor are these the only funerals in the poem. Other connections and associations seems self-evident. The anonymous grieving woman at Beowulf’s own funeral (lines 3150–5) surely calls to mind Hildeburh grieving for her own dead in the Finn-episode (lines 1114–18a), just as Sigemund’s dragon-slaying (lines 874b–97) surely calls to mind Beowulf’s own (lines 2543–820). Still other similar scenes in the poem, whether of feasting, fighting, sailing, or sleeping, all seem interconnected by verbal or thematic parallels: it is as if the poet has extended the patterns of repetition and variation that are his stock-in-trade at the sub-verbal, verbal, and phrasal levels to the wider levels of theme and scene, and is inviting his audience continually to compare and contrast different aspects of his text. Whereas it used to be argued that the many apparent ‘digressions’ in the poem, and what Klaeber famously characterised as the poem’s ‘lack of steady advance’, represented some kind of major structural flaw, it is now accepted that all of the so-called digressions lend considerable depth and contrast to the events of the main narrative.

Further analysis has pointed up the existence in Beowulf (as in a number of other works composed using the formulaic techniques of a ultimately orally derived tradition) of several stock scenes and themes found elsewhere in extant Old English poetry. The best-attested of such formulaic type-scenes is undoubtedly that of the ‘beasts of battle’, which occurs more than a dozen times in surviving Old English verse, but other themes have also been identified in Beowulf, so linking it not only to other texts within the extant corpus of Old English poetry, but more widely with texts composed in other languages, and at other times. It is clear that this kind of set-piece scene provides an essential building-block in the composition of traditional epics. The occurrence of such themes, like the clear patterning of repeated sounds, words, phrases and scenes within Beowulf, only underlines the extent to which aspects of an inherited tradition have been adopted and adapted by the Beowulf-poet. The further fact that, as we shall see, elements of the narrative of Beowulf itself seem to resurface widely in other literatures composed in a variety of languages and places.

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139 See, for example, the detailed discussion by Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in ‘Beowulf’*, esp. pp. 9–113. On envelope-patterns, see above, pp. 78–85.
140 Cf. Bennett, ‘The Female Mourner at Beowulf’s Funeral’; Mustanoja, ‘The Unnamed Woman’s Song of Mourning over Beowulf and the Tradition of Ritual Lamentation’.
141 See further below, pp. 177 and 181.
142 See further below, pp. 234–7.
143 See further below, pp. 238–64.
145 Central to this debate was the work of Bonjour, *The Digressions in ‘Beowulf’*; see too Bjork, ‘Digressions and Episodes’, for a characteristically clear and fair-minded overview. Among more recent noteworthy attempts to reassess the whole concept of the digression in Beowulf is that by Diller, ‘Contiguity and Similarity in the Beowulf Digressions’.
146 See n. 110 above.
seems to show the benefits of considering Beowulf not simply as an isolated poem preserved by chance in a single damaged manuscript.\textsuperscript{148}

But, as we have seen, that manuscript can still offer useful primary evidence,\textsuperscript{149} even about the structure of Beowulf itself. Most modern editions of Beowulf follow the marked fitt-divisions in the manuscript to a greater or lesser extent; but in the case of these divisions (like the poem itself) the scribes have not left an unproblematic text.\textsuperscript{150} Table II, below, shows the distribution of fitt-numbers throughout the poem.\textsuperscript{151} Several have evidently been corrected,\textsuperscript{152} and three are missing entirely and need to be supplied (XXVIII, XXX, and XXXVIII). As with a number of other features in the manuscript,\textsuperscript{153} the way each scribe indicates a change of fitt is somewhat different:

though both use closing punctuation and capitalisation to signal their intent, only scribe A tends to leave a blank line.\textsuperscript{154} Notwithstanding such differences, some clear patterns seem to emerge from a consideration of the surviving fitt-divisions. First, the notion of incremental repetition is markedly in evidence: many of the fitts begin in very similar ways. No fewer than ten begin with a variant of the formula ‘X maþelode’ (nos. VI, VII, VIII, XIII, XX, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXVI, and [XXVIII]), and eleven commence with a simple connective DA (nos. I, X, XI, XIII, XVI, XXXIII, XXXVII, XXXVIII, [XXXVIII], and XLII), mostly capitalised thus (the exceptions are XI, [XXXVIII], and XLII); other patterns are also discernible, such as (GE)wat ða . . . (G)Ewitan him ða . . . GEwat him ða . . . GEwitæd þonne (nos. II, XVII, XXVIII, and XXXV). Such patterning may allow us to feel some confidence in the editorial restoration of gefrægn in XXXVII (to match the Da ic . . . gefrægn of XXXVIII),\textsuperscript{155} and the notion that the start of [XXX] should indeed be placed at line 2039a, beginning Oððæt (compare XXV Oðþæt).\textsuperscript{156}

Closer examination, however, reveals a number of oddities. It is striking that none of the ten fitts beginning with a variant of the formula ‘X maþelode’

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item For parallels and analogues to parts of the narrative of Beowulf, see below, pp. 100–29 and 142–62.
\item See above, pp. 12–56.
\item In the discussion below, I retain the numbering of the fitts familiar to most readers of the text through the editions of (for example) Klaeber or Mitchell and Robinson, using (as do most editors) upper-case Roman numerals for clarity; the numbers in the manuscript itself are uniformly lower-case Roman. Conner, ‘The Section Numbers in the Beowulf Manuscript’, and Owen-Crocker, The Four Funerals in ‘Beowulf’, pp. 138–45 both argue on the basis of the corrected numbers and other evidence that the first twenty-four fitts are numbered retrospectively, and that from then on the numbering precedes the fitt. I include Conner’s numbering in a second column. For arguments that the fitt-numbering has been misinterpreted, see below, n. 159.
\item Numbers XXVIII–XXVIII represent later corrections, apparently in a later hand, from XXV–XXVIII; see further Kiernan, ‘Beowulf’ and the ‘Beowulf’-Manuscript, pp. 265–6.
\item On differences between the scribes, see above, pp. 20–2.
\item Such a practice is in keeping with scribe B’s tendency to conserve space, for example, through the more frequent use of abbreviations. See further above, p. 21.
\item Note that fitt XIII also begins with the related formula mine gefræge. On such formulas in general, see below, pp. 99–100.
\item On the importance of the word opfæt in the structure of Beowulf as a whole, see Irving, A Reading of ‘Beowulf’, pp. 31–42; Gruber, ‘Motion, Perception, and opfæt in Beowulf’.
\end{enumerate}
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<th>Fitt-number (Conner)</th>
<th>Folio</th>
<th>Opening line of fitt (with manuscript capitalisation)</th>
<th>Line-number</th>
<th>No. of lines in fitt</th>
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<td>129r1</td>
<td>HWÆT WE GARDeNa in geardagum</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>ÐA wæs on burgum beowulf scyldinga</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(GE)wat ða neosian syþðan niht becom</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Swa ða mælceare maga healfdenes</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>IIIII</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Him se yldesta ondswarode</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Stræt wæs stanfah stig wisode</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>VI</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hroðgar maþelode helm scyldinga</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Hroðgar maþelode helm scyldinga</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>HVNferð maþelode ecglafes bearn</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIIIII</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Swa mec gelome laðgeteonian</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>103</td>
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<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>ÐA him hroþgar gewat mid his hæleþa gedryht</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>XI</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Da com of more under misthleþum</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>XII</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nolde eorla hleo ænge þinga</td>
<td>791</td>
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<tr>
<td>XIII</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>DA wæs on morgen mine gefræge</td>
<td>837</td>
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<td>XIIIII</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Hroðgar maþelode he to healle geon(g)</td>
<td>925</td>
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<tr>
<td>XV</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>DA wæs hatten hreþe Heort innanweard</td>
<td>991</td>
<td>59</td>
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<tr>
<td>XVI</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>DA gyt æghwylcum eorla drihten</td>
<td>1050</td>
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<tr>
<td>XVII</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>(G)Ewiton him ða wigend wica neosian</td>
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<td>XVIII</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>HIm wæs ful boren ond freondlaþu</td>
<td>1192</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>XVIIIII</td>
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<td>SIgon þa to slepe sum sare angeald</td>
<td>1251</td>
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<td>XX</td>
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<td>Hroðgar maþelode helm scyldinga</td>
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<td>XXI</td>
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<td>XXII</td>
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<td>XXIII</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>164r15</td>
<td>GEseah ða on searwum sigeeadig bil</td>
<td>1557</td>
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<td>XXIII*</td>
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<td>BEOwulf maþelode bearn ecgþeowe(s)</td>
<td>1651</td>
<td>89</td>
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<td>XXV*</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>169v15</td>
<td>Oðþæt him on innan oferhygda dæl</td>
<td>1740</td>
<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td>XXVI*</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>169r16</td>
<td>(Be)owulf maþelode bearn ecgþeowe(s)</td>
<td>1817</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>XXVII*</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>171v15</td>
<td>CWOM þa to flode felamodigra</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>XXVIII*</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>173r6</td>
<td>GEwat him ða se hearda mid his hondscole</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>[XXVIII]</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>174v20</td>
<td>Biowulf maþelode bearn ecgþeowe(s)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>[XXX]</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>177r18</td>
<td>Swa se ðeodkyning þeawum lyfde</td>
<td>2144</td>
<td>77</td>
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<td>XXXI</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>179t14</td>
<td>Nealles [mid] gewealdum wyrhmord abræc</td>
<td>2221</td>
<td>91</td>
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<td>XXXII</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>181r18</td>
<td>ÐA se gæst ongan gledum spiwan</td>
<td>2312</td>
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<td>XXXIII</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>183v9</td>
<td>SE ðæs leodhryres lean gemunde</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>184v10</td>
<td>GEwiteð þonne on sealman sorhleoð gæleð</td>
<td>2460</td>
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<td>XXXVI</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>187r12</td>
<td>(W)IGlaf wæs haten woxtanes sunu</td>
<td>2602</td>
<td>92</td>
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<tr>
<td>XXXVII</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>189A(197)v12</td>
<td>ÐA ic æt þearfe [gefægn] þeodcyninges</td>
<td>2694</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXXVIII</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>189v17</td>
<td>ÐA ic snude gefægn sunu wihstanes</td>
<td>2752</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[XXXVIII]</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>191r13</td>
<td>Ða wæs gegongen gumum unfrodum</td>
<td>2821</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>XL</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>192t8</td>
<td>Heht ða þæt headoweorc to hagan biodan</td>
<td>2892</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XLI</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>193v8</td>
<td>Wæs sio swatswaðu sw[e]ona ond geata</td>
<td>2946</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XLII</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>195v15</td>
<td>Þa wæs gesyne þæt se sið ne ðah</td>
<td>3058</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XLIII</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>198t12</td>
<td>Him ða gegiredan geata leode</td>
<td>3137</td>
<td>46</td>
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* XXIII–XXVIII have been altered from XXV–XXVIII by a later hand
should be in the second part of the poem, that tells of Beowulf’s fight with the dragon, even though six of the thirteen designated speech-acts in that section of the poem begin that way (as against twenty of the thirty-two in the first part of the poem). Likewise, it seems curious that four of the first five examples of the ‘X mapelode’ formula should refer to Hrothgar, and that all five of the last five examples should refer to Beowulf: up to line 1382 (when Hrothgar predominantly opens the fitt) Beowulf speaks seven times (four times using the formula Beowulf mapelode), and after line 1383 (when Beowulf exclusively opens the fitt) Hrothgar speaks twice (both times with the formula Hroðgar mapelode). Perhaps most striking of all is the full capitalisation of Beowulf’s name at the openings of fitts XXI and XXII (the medial numbers of the sequence), since he has already been named almost a dozen times previously in the nominative case alone.

Such patterning might tempt one to suggest that the fitt-division was authorial, or at least earlier than the manuscript-version that survives (and indeed altered in transmission by the scribes of the Beowulf-manuscript in much the same way as the rest of the text). But such a conclusion is not without difficulties of its own, given the wild disparity in length of the surviving fitts, which vary from around forty lines to over 140. Moreover, although many of the fitt-divisions come at logical pauses in the narrative sequence, several seem to cut across natural breaks, and it is easy to suggest alternative placements. As it stands, for example, fitt XXXI begins in the middle of a speech by Beowulf, whereas it might just as well begin only eight lines further on, at the end of same speech, with line 2152a (Het ða in beran), which would indeed echo the beginning of the existing fitt XL (Heht ða þæt heaðoweorc). Likewise, fitt VIII begins in the middle of Beowulf’s reply to Unferth, the opening of fitt XI interrupts the celebrated com . . . com . . . com sequence that describes Grendel’s approach to Heorot, the battles with both Grendel and his mother are interrupted by the openings of fitts XII and XXIII, as are the Finn- and

157 See Table IV and the discussion below, pp. 205–8, for details.
158 At lines 343a, 405a*, 506a, 529a*, 631a*, 676a, 957a*, 1024b, 1191a, 1299b, and 1310b (the asterisk denotes the appearance of the word in the formula Beowulf mapelode).
160 Compare the conclusion of Mitchell and Robinson, ed., Beowulf, p. 7, who point out that in the Junius manuscript the fitt numbering continues through all four poems seriatim, and suggest that ‘when scribes A and B were copying Beowulf, their exemplar could have been in a manuscript where the fitt numbers started not at I but rather at some advanced number . . . and that in that case the scribes would naturally renumber the fitts, and in the course of doing so, they might well blunder occasionally.’
161 If we accept the modern placement of the missing fitt-numbers [XXVIII] and [XXX], then fitts XXVIII and [XXVIII] are only thirty-six and forty lines long respectively; the shortest fitt, the extent of which is clearly indicated in the manuscript, is VII (forty-three lines); the longest fitt is XXXV (142 lines).
162 So, for example, the end of a fitt coincides with the end of a speech in the following cases: III, III, V, VI, VIII, XX, XVIII, XXXVII, and [XXXVIII].
163 Cf. Horowitz, ‘The Interrupted Battles in Beowulf’, who argues that in these and other cases the placement of the fitt-division is artful.
Ingeld-episodes by fitts XVII and [XXX], and Hrothgar’s sermon, Beowulf’s lengthy musings on the sadness of King Hrethel, and the Geatish messenger’s woeful prophecy about the fate of his people are all (perhaps mercifully) broken up by the commencements of fitts XXV, XXXV, and XLI respectively. Despite a number (and that is the right word) of sometimes overly ingenious suggestions about the significance of the fitt-numbers, several of which solve certain local difficulties, it remains hard to see a clear pattern to their overall placement.

In the end, it is perhaps fitting that arguments about the structure of Beowulf should have recourse to visual as well as aural cues. For a poem which is steeped in the traditional techniques of the ultimately oral Germanic tradition, yet which fairly flaunts its indebtedness to a Christian culture ultimately based on Latin letters, so much seems simply apposite. In the past, critics have been torn as to whether to regard Beowulf as primarily a tripartite structure, focusing on the three main monster-fights, or a bipartite structure split between accounts of the hero’s youth in Denmark or his old age in Geatland; recently it has even been suggested that in fact the poem has a four-part structure, based on funerals. In truth, however, it seems simplistic to regard Beowulf as primarily based on a two-part, three-part, four-part, or even, considering the divisions in the manuscript, a forty-three- (or even forty-four-) part structure. By means of a series of aural (and perhaps visual) cues, the Beowulf-poet surely invites his audience to make an intricate network of comparisons and contrasts at every level of diction through the related mechanisms of repetition and variation that lie at the heart of the style and structure of this complex text. Moreover, the same appositional principles of repetition and variation apply not only to the form of the poem but to its content, which (as we shall see) seems drawn from a range of quite disparate sources. It is the variety of such influences, whether oral or written, native or imported, Germanic or Latin-derived, secular or Christian, that will prove the focus for the next two chapters, which consider more closely the literary background to Beowulf.

See n. 159 above.

Owen-Crocker, The Four Funerals in ‘Beowulf’. The four funerals of the title are those of Scyld Scefing and Beowulf at either end of the poem, and those associated with the Finn-episode on the one hand and on the other (as Owen Crocker argues on pp. 61–84) the so-called ‘lay of the last survivor’. 
Myth and Legend

*Looking back in ‘Beowulf’*

From its opening line, *Beowulf* firmly asserts itself as a retrospective text, and by situating its story in pre-Christian Scandinavia deliberately distances in both time and space its Anglo-Saxon audience (of whatever date) from the events it describes. But, as Roberta Frank has elegantly shown, the *Beowulf*-poet also demonstrates a keen sense of history, layering his text with considerable skill;¹ if the main events of the poem take place over just a few days on either side of a fifty-year hiatus, we are nonetheless kept (relatively) well-informed about five generations of Danish kings, four of the Geatish royal line, and three more of that of the Swedish kings,² not to mention a small band of other kings of peripheral dynasties, such as Offa, celebrated king of the Continental Angles, or Finn, king of the Frisians.³ From the period before the mysterious arrival of Scyld Scefing at the beginning of the poem, we are aware of still earlier figures, like Sigemund, Heremod, Eormenric, Hama, and Weland, and before them of the time of the biblical Flood, and Cain and Abel, right back to Creation itself.⁴ The poem ends with a grim sense of future disaster for Beowulf’s people that partly bridges the gap between the Anglo-Saxon audience and the events of the poem proper.

But if the *Beowulf*-poet seems unconcerned about precisely dating the events of his poem, modern scholarship has (in part) supplied the answer: if Hygelac’s fatal raid against the Franks (mentioned no fewer than five times in the poem)⁵

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² See the genealogies above, pp. xiv–xv.


⁵ The raid is mentioned at lines 1202–14a, 2201b, 2354b–66, 2493b–2508, and 2910b–21; see too further below, pp. 114–15, 121, and 134.
can be identified with that of one ‘Chlochilaicus’ first described in the sixth-century *Historia Francorum* of Gregory of Tours, then it seems to have occurred around the year 520, a date consistent with the death of King Onela of Sweden (if he is rightly identified as King Áli) around the year 535. We are therefore left with a gap of at least 150 years before the composition of *Beowulf*, which no modern scholar seems to suppose to have occurred before 685, the putative rough date of composition of *Cædmon’s Hymn*. The extent to which such a gap could been filled (at least in part) by oral traditions is a moot point for modern scholarship, but certainly the *Beowulf*-poet himself seems to claim as much in the opening lines of the poem, with its call for aural attention and identification of himself with the audience as recipients of traditional lore (**Hwæt! We...g efrunon**, lines 1a and 2b). Although this is the only occasion on which the first-person plural form is used in such a way, the poet goes on several times in the course of *Beowulf* to punctuate his tale with (mostly) first-person singular formulas such as **ne gehyrde ic** (‘I never heard’, lines 38a and 1842b), **secgan hyrde** (‘heard tell’, lines 273b, 882b, 875b, and 1346b), **hyrde ic** (‘I heard’, lines 62a, 2163a, and 2172a), **mine gefræge** (‘as I have heard tell’, lines 776b, 837b, 1955b, 2685b, and 2837b), **ic gefrægn** (‘I learnt’, lines 74a, 1196b, 2484a, 2752a, 2773a, and [by emendation] 2694a), and **ne gefrægn ic** (‘I never learnt’, lines 575b, 1011a, and 1027a). It is not as if references to books and writing are uncommon in extant Old English verse; but they are alien to the world of *Beowulf*. And while given the extensive evidence for the influence of imported, Christian, Latinate, and written sources on Anglo-Saxon literary culture it would be foolish to dismiss entirely the notion that the *Beowulf*-poet, who was assuredly a Christian, was composing pen in hand after

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7 See, for example, Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, p. xxxviii. On Onela see, for example, Belden, ‘Onela the Scylding and Ali the Bold’.

8 Compare the view of Fulk, *History of Old English Meter*, p. 390, who concludes on linguistic grounds that *Beowulf* was most probably composed before 725 if Mercian in origin or before 825 if Northumbrian, but that a date as early as circa 685 ‘is considerably less probable’.

9 On these formulas in general, see Parks, ‘“I Heard” Formulas in Old English Poetry’.

10 It is interesting to note that the only comparable use of the first-person plural in this way is in the opening speech of *Beowulf* to the coastguard when he first broaches the question of Grendel’s persecution of the Danes ‘if it is as we have truly heard tell’ (**gif hit is / swa we soplice secgan hyrdon**, lines 272b–3).

11 So, for example, four times in his own works the poet Cynewulf apparently augments an inherited andaurally-derived formula by stating (somewhat paradoxically) ‘Listen! We have heard through holy books’ (**Hwæt! We...g efrunon þurh halige bec** [Fates of the Apostles, line 63; *Elene*, lines 364, 670, and 852]).

12 See in particular Frantzen, ‘Writing the Unreadable Beowulf’ (and cf. Bennett, ‘The Female Mourner at Beowulf’s Funeral’; McNelis, ‘The Sword Mightier Than the Pen? Hrothgar’s Hilt, Theory, and Philology’). Much of the focus has been on the engraving on the giant sword from Grendel’s mere, on which see, for example, Schrader, ‘The Language on the Giant’s Sword Hilt in *Beowulf*’. On the general topic of literacy and *Beowulf*, see, for example, John, ‘*Beowulf* and the Margins of Literacy’; Lerer, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature*; Near, ‘Anticipating Alienation: *Beowulf* and the Intrusion of Literacy’ (with responses from Frantzen and Overing); Waugh, ‘Literacy, Royal Power, and King-Poet Relations in Old English and Old Norse Compositions’.
consulting such materials, it would be equally naive to suppose that even the most educated churchman would be entirely immune from an awareness of native tradition: so much did Ingeld have to do with Christ.14

But to look beyond written, Latin, Christian sources for the threads from which the Beowulf-poet wove his tale is emphatically not simply to label such threads primarily (or even partially) as ‘pagan’.15 The search for pagan elements in Beowulf has a rocky history indeed,16 and it is as well to remember that throughout the entire span suggested for the composition of Beowulf pagan and Christian elements co-existed uneasily in Anglo-Saxon England: Wulfstan, writing in Old English at the beginning of the eleventh century, has as much to say in condemnation of heathen customs and practices, as Aldhelm, writing in Latin at the end of the seventh.17 In looking back in Beowulf we would do well to remember that in the carefully crafted layering of history provided by the poet, his primarily Christian audience had to cast an eye over Beowulf’s own time, and then beyond, to a time of secular myth and legend, before catching a glimpse of antediluvian biblical narrative stretching back to the dawn of time, with an antiquity and authority that the people of the poem, however hard they gaze upon it, like Hrothgar staring at the giant sword-hilt, simply cannot comprehend.19

Beginnings: Scyld Scefing and the Skjoldungs

Scyld Scefing is the progenitor of the royal line of the Danes, the father of Beow, great-grandfather of Hrothgar, and the heaven-sent saviour who came to the lordless Danes in the ‘dire distress’ (fyrenðearf, line 14b) that presumably

13 See further below, pp. 132–62.
14 On the famous passage in which Alcuin (following Jerome), questions the value of secular literature to Christians (Quid Hinieldus cum Christo), see, for example, Frank, ‘Germanic Legend in Old English Literature’, p. 91. The passage in question is to be found in Alcuin’s Epistola 124, ed. Dümmler, Alcuini Epistolae, p. 183; on the intended recipients of this letter, see Bullough, ‘What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne?’.
15 For a sensitive overview, see, for example, Harris, ‘Beowulf in Literary History’.
17 On the vexed question of dating, see above, pp. 5–6.
18 For an overview, see, for example, Stanley, ‘Haethena Hyht in Beowulf’.
19 Cf. Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, p. 67.
20 On the form of the name, see above, pp. 103–4.
resulted from the wicked deeds of Heremod.\textsuperscript{21} The B- and C-manuscripts of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (\textit{sub anno} 855) trace the ancestry of the West-Saxon royal house from Åethelwulf back past Woden to an ark-born son of Noah,\textsuperscript{22} in a genealogy which contains a number of the same or similar names; the relevant section reads as follows:\textsuperscript{23}

Geatt Tætwaing, Tætwa Beawing, Beaw Scealdwaing, Scealdwa Heremoding, Heremod Itermoning, Itermon Haþraing, Haþra Hwalaing, Hwala Bedwiging, Bedwig Sceafing, id est filius Noe, se waes geboren on þære earce Noes.

[‘Geatt, son of Tætwa, Tætwa son of Beaw, Beaw son of Scealdwa, Scealdwa son of Heremod, Heremod son of Itermon, Itermon son of Haþra, Haþra son of Hwala, Hwala son of Bedwig, Bedwig son of Sceaf. He is Noah’s son, and was born on Noah’s ark.’]

What in \textit{Beowulf} appears as a direct line of descent Scef–Scyld–Beow is here obscured: although Scealdwa is still the father of Beaw, Scealdwa’s own father is given as Heremod, Scyld’s presumed predecessor as Danish king in \textit{Beowulf},\textsuperscript{24} with Sceaf listed six generations further back. In his Latin translation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, written some time between 975 and 983, Åethelweard offers instead a truncated version of Åethelwulf’s genealogy that seems closer to \textit{Beowulf}:\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

[‘His fifteenth [forefather] was Geat, the sixteenth Tetwa, the seventeenth Beo, the eighteenth Scyld, the nineteenth Scef. That Scef arrived with one light vessel on an oceanic island called Skåne, surrounded by weapons, and he was an extremely young lad, unknown to the inhabitants of that land. Yet he was accepted by them, and they kept him lovingly as a member of the clan, and afterwards picked him as their king; and from his line King Åethelwulf derived his descent.’]

In this account, not only is the line of direct descent Scef–Scyld–Beo preserved, but so too is the myth of an unknown progenitor from beyond the sea, although in this case (rather as in the notion that Sceaf is the ark-born son of Noah) it is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} For the ark-born son of Noah, see Anlezark, ‘The Old Testament Patriarchs in Anglo-Saxon England’, pp. 62–112; Hill, ‘The Myth of the Ark-Born Son of Noah’.
\item \textsuperscript{23} O’Brien O’Keeffe, ed., \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: MS C}, p. 57.
\item \textsuperscript{24} On Heremod, see further below, pp. 104–14.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Campbell, ed., \textit{Chronicon Åethelweardi}, p. 33.
\end{itemize}
Scyld Scefing and his arrival from overseas cannot have been part of the prologue of *Beowulf* before 858, and almost certainly not before Alfred’s reign, a conclusion vigorously opposed by Richard North, who also considers the anomaly that according both to Æthelweard and the augmented version of the genealogy found in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, it is Sce(a)f, rather than Scyld, who arrives as a foundling from over the sea. It is perhaps unsurprising that William of Malmesbury, writing his *Gesta Regum Anglorum* c. 1125, and clearly using both Æthelweard and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as sources, should also insist that the name of the foundling child was Sceaf. A still later analogue is found in the thirteenth-century account of a ritual dated to the time of King Edmund (941–6), by which the monks of Abingdon Monastery established their rights to a certain piece of land.

Quod dum servi Dei propensius actitarent, inspiratum est eis salubre consilium et (ut pium est credere) divinitus provisum. Die etenim statuto mane surgentes monachi sumpserunt scutum rotundum, cui imponebant manipulum frumenti, et super manipulum cereum circumspectae quantitatis et grossitudinis. Quo accenso, scutum cum manipulo et cereo, fluvio ecclesiam praetercurrente committunt, paucis in navicula fratribus subsequentibus. Praecedebat itaque eos scutum et quasi digito demonstrans possessiones domui Abbendoniae de jure adjacentes, nunc hoc, nunc illuc divertens; nunc in dextra, nunc in sinistra parte fiducaliter eos praeibat, usque ad rivum prope pratum quod Beri vocatur, in quo cereus medium cursum Tamisiae miraculose deserens se declinavit et circumdedit pratum inter Tamisiam et Gifteleia, quod hieme et multociens aestate ex redundancye Tamisiae in modum insulae aqua circumdatur.

[While the servants of God were rather fervently pleading this [case], they were inspired by a plan which was both helpful and (as it is pious to believe), divinely provided. For on an appointed day the monks got up in the morning and took up a round shield, on which they placed a sheaf of corn, and above the sheaf a candle of considered size and thickness. After lighting this, they entrusted the shield with sheaf and candle to the river flowing past the church, with a few brothers following in a little boat. The shield went before them and as if with a finger indicated the adjacent lawful possessions of the house of

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26 See further Hill, ‘Scyld Sceaf and the stirps regia’.
31 Stevenson, ed., *Chronicon Monasterii de Abingdon*, I.89. See too the discussion on this and the earlier passages cited by Tolley, ‘*Beowulf*’s Scyld Sceafing Episode’, pp. 9-11; North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, pp. 182-94.
Abingdon, turning now this way, now that; now to the left, now to the right it faithfully went before them until it came to a meadow which is called Beri, at which the candle, miraculously abandoning the middle current of the Thames, turned off and went around the meadow between the Thames and Iffley, which in winter and many times in the summer is surrounded by water in the manner of an island, thanks to the overflow of the Thames.]

The fact that this extraordinary account is only preserved in a thirteenth-century chronicle need not impugn its authority: the so-called Abingdon Chronicle certainly drew on much earlier sources, although that too need not make the details of the ritual contemporary with the mid-tenth-century date they claim. But it is hard to escape the general parallel with the Scyld Scefing episode in Beowulf, and certain aspects of the account, for example the casual reference to the round shields that were the norm before the Conquest, or the early form of the place-name Gifteleia, seem to suggest at least a certain antiquity for the episode.32

What all these analogues, together with others from Norse eddic poetry and Finnish material,33 do seem to suggest is that behind the tale of Scyld Scefing lies a myth about a fertility god, who came across water.34 The name of Scyld’s own son, Beow,35 which means ‘barley’, seems to confirm the notion. In transferring the tale from father to son and having Scyld be the one to make a mysterious sea-bourne arrival, the Beowulf-poet looks ahead to the main events of his story: like Scyld Scefing, Beowulf himself will come unannounced across the sea as a ‘shield’ or protection to aid the Danes in their ‘dire distress’ (fyrenðearf, line 14); like the ‘vigorous’ Scyld (felahror, line 27a) so too the ‘vigorous’ Beowulf (hroran, line 1629a), who, like Scyld, departs from Denmark in a treasure-laden vessel never to be seen there again, eventually dies and passes into the ‘keeping’ of an unspecified higher authority (on Frean wære, line 27b; on ðæs Waldendes wære, line 3109a).36 And of Beowulf too, the poet seems to say: þæt wæs god cyning (‘that was a good king!’), lines 11b and 2390b.37

Comparison with Scyld, however, need not necessarily cast Beowulf in the

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32 Cf. Tolley, ‘Beowulf’s Scyld Scefing Episode’, p. 11.
33 Fulk, ‘An Eddic Analogue to the Scyld Scefing Story’; Harris, ‘The Dossier on Byggvir, God and Hero’; Tolley, ‘Beowulf’s Scyld Scefing Episode’.
34 Mythological interpretations of Beowulf as a whole have been somewhat out of favour since Müllenhof, ‘Der Mythus von Beovulf’, famously interpreted (for example) Grendel as the North sea.
35 The spelling of the name of Scyld’s son is somewhat controversial: the manuscript clearly reads ‘Beowulf’ on both occasions (lines 18 and 53) where it occurs, and a case can be made on artistic grounds for pointing up the extent to which the poem’s eponymous hero might be said to be a ‘spiritual son’ of Scyld; however, a form such as ‘Beow’ is found in the appropriate place in a number of genealogies, and, as Fulk, ‘An Eddic Analogue’, p. 314, n. 4, indicates, is supported metrically in line 53: it is perhaps more likely that a scribe has anticipated the name of the poem’s hero. Cf. the extensive use of capitals to highlight Beowulf’s name at the beginnings of fitts XXI and XXII; see Table II above, pp. 94–95.
36 The parallels are the stronger in that these are the only occurrences of hror and (in this sense) wær in the whole poem.
37 This is to assume that line 2390b indeed refers to Beowulf, as most commentators seem to suppose; the syntax of the sentence might just as easily refer to Onela. The same half-line, unambiguously referring to Hrothgar, appears at line 863b.
best light: Scyld carved out through conquest a country for himself, and, crucially, left his people a long line of kings, while Beowulf famously delays seizing the crown, and leaves his people lordless.\textsuperscript{38} Moreover, the anarchic chaos that the Danes suffer before Scyld’s arrival is precisely the fate predicted for the Geats after Beowulf’s demise, a circularity of circumstance that is only heightened if we assume that the Danes’ initial difficulties arise as a direct result of the selfish actions of Heremod, Scyld’s immediate predecessor in a number of royal genealogies.\textsuperscript{39} Certainly the double gnomic injunction (the first in the poem) that follows the introduction of Scyld’s son, Beow, contrasts sharply with what is known elsewhere in \textit{Beowulf} of the illiberal niggardliness of the doomed Heremod (lines 20–5):\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{quote}
Swa sceal geong guma gode gewyrcean,
fromum feohgiftum on faeder bearme,
þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen
wilgesiþas, þonne wig cume,
leode gelæsten: losfdædum sceal
in mægba gehwære man geþeon.
\end{quote}

[So ought a young man bring about through good actions, with generous gifts of property while under his father’s protection, that when he grows old willing retainers will remain with him when war comes, repay their prince; by praiseworthy deeds a man ought to prosper among every nation.]

Beowulf should be so lucky. True enough, like Beow, in his youth Beowulf’s ‘fame spread widely’ (\textit{blædwide sprang}, line 18b),\textsuperscript{41} but although as Beowulf faces the dragon alone Wiglaf twice reminds his retainers of their lord’s former generosity (lines 2633–60 and 2864–91), he is the only one to ‘repay their prince’.\textsuperscript{42} That Scyld himself was luckier, and amply fulfilled the heroic ideal of generosity is made explicit in the description of his funeral that follows: the ‘willing companions’ of the gnomic passage (\textit{wilgesiþas}, line 23a) are actualised in the ‘dear companions’ (\textit{swæse gesiþas}, line 29a) who participate in the funeral of ‘the Scyldings’ friend, the beloved leader of the land’ (\textit{wine Scyldinga, leof landfruma}, lines 30b–31a); in what is surely a telling collocation in this context, they ‘laid their beloved lord, distributor of rings, in the bosom of the ship, famous by the mast’ (\textit{aledon þa leofne þeoden, / beaga bryttan on bearm scipes, / mærne be mæste}, lines 34–6a). In the only other use of the phrase in the poem, Beowulf himself is described as a ‘beloved lord’ (\textit{leofne þeoden}, line 3079b) by Wiglaf, even as he criticises him for spurning the advice to let the dragon well

\textsuperscript{38} Cf. Hollis, ‘\textit{Beowulf} and the Succession’; Schrader, ‘Succession and Glory in \textit{Beowulf}’.

\textsuperscript{39} See, for example, above, p. 101.

\textsuperscript{40} On Heremod, see below, pp. 105–14, 159–61, and 171–2.

\textsuperscript{41} Harris, ‘The Dossier on Byggvir, God and Hero’, pp. 13–14, is surely right to assume that (as with Scyld) the \textit{Beowulf}-poet is here punning on Beow’s name: the noun \textit{blæd} means both ‘fame’ ‘glory’ and ‘blossom’, ‘growth’, ‘blade (as of grass)’, while the verb \textit{springan} means both ‘to grow (as a plant)’ and ‘to spread’. For other puns on names in \textit{Beowulf}, see below, pp. 171–2.

\textsuperscript{42} One might further note that the Geatish messenger, reporting Beowulf’s death, calls him first of all a \textit{wilgeofa} (‘willing-giver’, line 2900a).
alone. Likewise, in what is surely a deliberate echo, Beowulf’s own men, having built his pyre ‘laid in the midst their famous prince, grieving warriors, their beloved lord’ (alegdon ða tomiddes mærne þeoden / hæleð hiofende hlaford leofne, lines 3141–2). In such ways do the resonances of the first lines of Beowulf still echo at the end.

Men and monsters: Sigemund and Heremod

But if the Beowulf-poet seems content to manipulate myth in the service of his story, so too he seems at times to play fast and loose with legend. If the tale of the sea-bourne arrival of Scyld Scefing has been borrowed from his father for the sake of a parallel with Beowulf and a pun on his name (‘shield’, ‘protector’), then in his account of the dragon-slaying Sigemund, the Beowulf-poet from much the same motive apparently transfers a famous exploit from Sigemund’s son. The onomastic allusion is in this case more groanworthy, since Sigemund means ‘victory-hand’ and the episode is recounted after Beowulf’s victory has rendered Grendel armless, but the direct comparison of Sigemund and Beowulf is all the more direct. A combined company of Geats and Danes ride back from the monster-mere in high spirits, having seen Grendel’s blood in the water, and are busy celebrating Beowulf’s deeds (lines 853–63). There follow three related passages describing the journey home, carefully connected by the poet through the repetition of the word hwilum (‘at times’, lines 864a, 867b, and 916a). The first and third of these simply describes the light-hearted horse-races that take place on the way, and these descriptions form an envelope around the central description of how a poet compares Beowulf’s own deeds with those of the legendary heroes of the past (lines 867b–915):
ellendædum, uncuþes fela,
Wælsinges gewin, wide siðas,
þara þe gumena bearn gearwe ne wiston,
fæhœ ond fyrena, buton Fitela mid hine,
þonne he swulces hwæt secgan wolde,
eam his nefan, swa hie a væron
æt niða gehwam nydgesteallan;
hæfðon ealfela eotena cynnes
sweordum gesæged. Sigemundes gesprong
æfter deaðdæge dom unlytel,
syþðan wiges heard wyrm acwealde,
hordes hyrde. He under harne stan,
æþelinges bearn, ana geneðode
frecne dæde, ne wæs him Fitela mid.
hwæþre him gesælde þæt þæt swurd þurhwod
wrætelcne wyrm, þæt hit on wealle ætstod,
dryhtlic iren; draca morðre swealt.
Hæfde aglæca elne gegongen
þæt he beahhordes brucan moste
selfes dome; sæbat gehleod,
bær on bearm scipes beorhte frætwæ,
Wælses eafera. Wyrm hat gemealt.
Se wæs wrec cena wide mærost
ofor werþode, wigendra hleo,
ellendædum (he þæs ær onðah),
siððan Heremodes hild sweþrode,
eafð ond ellen. He mid Eotenum wearð
on feonda geweald forð forlacem,
snude forsended. Hine sorhwylmas
lemede to lange; he his leodum wearð,
eallum æþellingum to aldorceare;
swylce oft bemearn ðerran mælum
swiþferþæs sið snotor ceorl monig,
se þe him bealwa to bote gelyfde,
þæt þæt ðæotnes bearn geþeon scolde,
fæderæþelum onfón, folc gehealdan,
hord ond hleoburh, hæleþa rice,
. X. Scyldinga. He þær eallum wearð,
mæg Higelaces, manna cynne,
freondum gefægra; hine fyren onwod.

[Sometimes the king’s thegn, a man filled with eloquent speech,
mindful of songs, who remembered many great numbers of ancient
traditions, devised another word, truly linked. The man began to recount
with skill Beowulf’s exploit, and successfully recount a skilful tale,
varying words. He told everything that he had heard tell about
Sigemund, his mighty deeds, many a strange thing, the Wælsing’s
struggle, his distant travels, feuds and crimes, those which the children
of men did not readily recall, except for Fitela (who was) with him,
when he wanted to say some such thing as an uncle to his sister’s son,
since they were ever comrades in need in every attack: they had laid low
with their swords a multitude of giants’ kin. On Sigemund there fell
after his death-day no small judgment (or ‘glory’), after the man keen in battle killed a serpent, the guardian of a hoard. Under a grey stone the prince’s son attempted the perilous deed alone: Fitela was not with him; yet it befell him that his sword passed through the wondrous serpent, so that it stuck in the wall, the noble blade; the dragon perished in the slaying. The awesome assailant had brought it about by his valour that he might enjoy the ring-hoard at his own choice. He loaded a sea-boat, the son of Wæls, bore into the ship’s bosom bright ornaments; the hot serpent melted away. He was the most widely known of exiles among the nations of men, for his mighty deeds, a protector of warriors – he had prospered for that – since the warlike vigour of Heremod diminished, his vigour and valour. He among the Jutes [or ‘giants’] was lured forth into the power of enemies, quickly put to death. Surgings of sorrow oppressed him too long; he turned out for his people, for all the nobles, a source of mortal worries; likewise many a wise man in earlier times often bemoaned the passage of the strong-minded one, who had put faith in him for relief from their miseries, that the prince’s son should prosper, take on his father’s nobility maintain the people, the treasure and the stronghold, the kingdom of warriors, the land of the Scyldings. He, Hygelac’s kinsman, turned out there to all, to the race of men, to his friends the dearer; sin entered him.

The passage, as befits one put in the mouth of ‘a man filled with eloquent speech’, is extremely artfully arranged, including a number of examples of assonance, clustered towards the beginning (gemyndig . . . gemunde . . . fand . . . gebunden . . . Sigemundes; worn . . . word; heard . . . hordes hyrde), and the use of rhyming parallel phrases (ðæt þæt swurd þurhwo d...þ æ th i to nw ealle ætstod, lines 890b and 891b; draca morðre swealt . . . Wyrm hat gemealt, lines 892b and 897b).

It is clear that Beowulf is somehow being compared and contrasted with two figures from the legendary past, Sigemund and Heremod, who in other sources are often themselves linked. The ‘king’s thegn’ who recites the lay is specifically said to be a man well-versed in ancient lore (guma gilphlæden, gidda gemynddig, se ðe ealfela ealdgesegena worn gemunde, lines 868–70a), but the assumption that the poet expected his audience to know the whole background of the material he has recited seems unwarranted: the Beowulf-poet goes out of his way to stress that this specific story about Sigemund at least was not common currency, saying that the king’s thegn included in his account ‘many an unfamiliar thing . . . that the sons of men did not readily know’ (uncupes fela . . . para þe gumena bearn gearwe ne wiston, lines 876b–78). Even the apparent exception to this rule, Fitela (buton Fitela mid hine, line 879b), is specifically excluded from the dragon-slaying exploit.

49 Cf. the comments of Opland, ‘Beowulf on the Poet’.

50 On this kind of word- and sound-play in the poem as a whole, see above, pp. 61–9.


52 See further Nolan and Bloomfield, ‘Beotword, gilpcwidas, and the gilphlædan Scop of Beowulf’.

that is the main focus here (*ne wæs him Fitela mid*, line 889b);\(^{54}\) the question naturally arises: from where did the king’s thegn get his information? Evidence outside *Beowulf* for a knowledge of Sigemund or Sigmundr in Anglo-Saxon England is decidedly thin: it is possible that he is represented on a fragmentary eleventh-century sculpture from Winchester, although quite what a depiction of a character from the heroic past apparently biting off a she-wolf’s tongue would be doing in a church-setting seems obscure.\(^{55}\)

Although perhaps it might be considered overly pedantic, the question of knowledge of Sigemund outside *Beowulf* has a serious point, since this is the only source which attributes a dragon-slaying to Sigemund, rather than to his son. Without exception in the Scandinavian traditions it is the hero Sigurðr the Vôlsung (Old English Wælsing),\(^ {56}\) rather than his father Sigmundr (Old English Sigemund) or his half-brother Sinfjôtli (Old English Fitela), who kills the terrible dragon Fáfnir and gains his cursed treasure.\(^ {57}\) The description of this fight in the prose introduction to the eddic poem *Fáfnismál*, moreover, makes it clear that quite a different kind of dragon-fight is envisaged in the Scandinavian sources:\(^ {58}\)

Sigurðr ok Reginn föru upp á Gnitheiði ok hittu þar slóð Fáfnis, þá er hann skreið til vatns. Par gerði Sigurðr grof mikla á veginum, ok gekk Sigurðr þar í. En er Fáfnir skreið af guillinu, blés hann eitri, ok hraut þat fyrir ofan hôfuð Sigurði. En er Fáfnir skreið yfir grofina, þá lagði Sigurðr hann með sverði til hjarta. Fáfnir hristi sik ok barði hôfuði ok sporði.

[Sigurd and Regin went up onto Gnitahath, and came upon the trail by which Fáfnir slithered to the water. Then Sigurd dug a large hole in the path, and Sigurd entered into it. When Fáfnir slithered away from his gold, he spewed poison, which spurted from above onto Sigurd’s head. When Fáfnir slithered over the hole, Sigurd pierced him to the heart with his sword. Fáfnir twisted about, flailing with his head and tail.]

Sigurd essentially ambushes Fáfnir on his way across heathland to water, thrusting up through the dragon’s middle; in the case of Sigemund, however, the dragon-fight clearly takes place in a cave by the sea, since Sigemund has to pass ‘under the grey stone’ (*under harne stan*, line 887b), his sword penetrates (presumably *not* from below) not just the dragon but the cave-wall (*þæt hit on wealle ætstod*, line 891b), and he has to load the treasure onto a sea-boat (*sæbat

\(^ {54}\) It seems somewhat odd to introduce Fitela only to dismiss him ten lines later; the poet’s point may well be to provide a contrast with Beowulf’s own dragon fight, where he certainly (unlike Sigemund) required assistance in the form of Wiglaf. See further below, pp. 256–63.


\(^ {56}\) On Sigurðr in general, see Ploss, *Siegfried-Sigurd, der Drachenkämpfer*.


gehleod, line 895b). In other words, the setting and manner of Sigemund’s otherwise unattested dragon-fight is precisely that of Beowulf’s own, fought against a creature from a cave beside the sea.59 Other verbal parallels (under harne stan, line 887b and 2553b; þæt swurd ðurhwod, line 890b and bil eal ðurhwod, line 1567b; draca morðre swealt, line 892b and oðþæt he morðre swealt, line 2782b; selves dome, line 895a and sylfes dome, line 2776a; gehleod, bær on bearm scipes, lines 895b–896a and him on bearm hladon, line 2775a) only underline the connection between the two episodes.60

If Sigemund is described as ‘hard in battle’ (wiges heard, line 886a), so too is Beowulf (beadwe heard, 1539a); if Beowulf can boast earlier in the poem that he has slain the ‘kin of giants’ (eotena cynn, line 421a), so too can Sigemund (eotena cynnes, line 883b). Moreover, both the apparent heroes share characteristics of their prey: each is described as an agléca (‘awesome assailant’, line 893a; cf. aglécean, line 2592a, used of Beowulf and the dragon together).61 The term (spelt in various ways) is altogether problematic, being used of Grendel (lines 159a, 425a, 433b, 592a, 646b, 732a, 816a, 989b, 1000b, and 1269a), his mother (aglécwif, line 1259a), the dragon (2520a, 2534a, 2557a, 2592a, and 2905a), and, perhaps, the creatures of the monster-mere (line 1512a, although the term could equally refer here again to Beowulf); of the ‘human’ characters, only Sigemund and Beowulf are so described.62

Moreover, the parallels between Sigemund and Beowulf which might be drawn are (as we saw with those between Scyld Scefing and Beowulf) not necessarily wholly to the latter’s credit. As Mark Griffith has recently shown, the depiction of Sigemund in Beowulf is far from simply positive: in particular, the attribution to Sigemund of ‘feuds and crimes’ (fæhðe ond fyrena, line 879a) aligns him squarely with Grendel, of whose acts the phrase has already been used twice in the poem (fæhðe ond fyrena, line 137a; fyrena ond fæhðe, line 153a).63 Likewise, many critics have seen in the half-line that describes the relationship between Sigemund and Fitlea a loaded reference: according to Volsunga saga Sigmundr sired Sinfjóttli incestuously on his own sister, Signý,64 making himself both the boy’s father and (more significantly) maternal uncle, the closest of male family relationships in the Germanic heroic world.65 It may

59 The general situation is commonly attested elsewhere; cf. (for example) Rauer, Beowulf and the Dragon, pp. 112–13 and 120–1, and below, pp. 149–51.
60 Griffith, ‘Some Difficulties’, pp. 33–4, who recognises most of these verbal parallels, objects that several of them would link Sigemund with Wiglaf, not Beowulf, but this is to ignore the extent to which in the second part of the poem Wiglaf is playing the same role as Beowulf in the first. See further below, pp. 256–63.
61 On the use of the term in Beowulf, see above, p. 90.
63 The only other usage of the phrase is by Beowulf himself, much later in the poem (fæhðe ond fyrena, line 2480a); as Griffith, ‘Some Difficulties’, p. 20, points out of the simplex firen: ‘The word appears seven times before this verse, always of the depredations of Grendel (101a, 137a, 153a, 164a, 628a, 750b, and 811a).’ For an alternative view, see Robinson, ‘Sigemund’s fæhðe ond fyrena: Beowulf 879a’.
64 Finch, ed., Volsunga saga: the Saga of the Volsungs, chapter 7 (pp. 9–10).
65 For a full analysis of the uncle-nephew relationship, see Bremmer, ‘The Importance of Kinship’; on a range of meanings of the term nefa, see Lowe, ‘Never say Nefa Again’. Cf. Spolsky, ‘Old English Kinship Terms and Beowulf’.
be that by omitting the expected Sin- element from Fitela’s name the poet is here subtly indicating the sin of incest.\textsuperscript{66} In the same way, the poet’s use of the description ‘many a strange thing’ (\textit{uncupes fela}, line 876b) to denote Sigemund’s activities carries interesting implications in a poem in which the term ‘strange’ (\textit{uncup}) is used mainly of Grendel and his kin; Grendel himself has demonstrated ‘strange aggression’ on his trips to Heorot (\textit{uncuðne nið}, line 276b), Beowulf later boasts of tackling the ‘power of the strange one’ (\textit{eafod uncupes}, line 960a), and both the path to the monster-mere and that to the dragon’s lair are described as ‘strange’ (\textit{uncuð gelad}, line 1410b; \textit{stig ... uncuð}, lines 2213b–2214a). Finally, the description of Sigemund as ‘the most famous of exiles’ (\textit{wrecenen ... maerost}, line 898) need not be wholly positive; the same term is used of the mercenary Hengest (line 1137b), and the motivation of being an exile is explicitly excluded as that which drove Beowulf to Denmark in the first place (\textit{nalles for wræcsiðum}, line 338b; compare line 2292a, \textit{wean ond wræcsid}). Given the ambiguous presentation of Sigemund here, and his strong identification in this passage with the performance of deeds of valour (\textit{ellendæðum}, lines 876a and 900a; \textit{elne}, line 873b), the stated interest of the \textit{Beowulf}-poet from the outset that it is \textit{ellen} (‘valour’) that is being celebrated seems still more double-edged.\textsuperscript{67}

But if the comparisons apparently being drawn between Sigemund and Beowulf are far from clear-cut, those between Beowulf and Heremod, equally famed (at least at first) for deeds of \textit{ellen} (or even between Heremod and Sigemund), are still more troubling and obscure. That the poet regards Heremod as a Danish king is clear not simply from the reference in this passage to the ‘homeland of the Scyldings’ (\textit{.X. Scyldinga}, line 913a),\textsuperscript{68} but from two later citations, in which his people are described as ‘honourable Scyldings’, ‘the people of the Danes’, and just ‘the Danes’ (\textit{Ar-Scyldingum}, line 1710b; \textit{Deniga leodum}, line 1712b; \textit{Denum}, line 1720a). This later passage, in which Hrothgar explicitly draws a parallel between Beowulf and Heremod, needs also to be considered here (lines 1707b–24a).\textsuperscript{69}

\begin{verbatim}
Du scealt to frofre weorþan
eal langtwidig leodum þinum,
hæleðum to helpe. Ne wearð Heremod swa
eaforum Ecgwelan, Ar-Scyldingum;
ne geweox he him to willan, ac to wælfealle
ond to deaðcwalum Deniga leodum;
breat bolgenmod beodgeneatas,
eaxlgesteallan, opþæt he ana hwearf,
mære þeoden, mondreamum from.

Þeh þe hine mihtig god mægenes wynnum,
eafeþum stepte, ofer ealle men
forð gefremede, hwæþere him on ferhþe greow
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{66} On the similar use of significant names in \textit{Beowulf}, see below, pp. 172–3.
\textsuperscript{67} On the central role of \textit{ellen} in \textit{Beowulf}, see above, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{68} On the use of the rune \textit{.X.} (\textit{eþel}, ‘homeland’) in the manuscript, see further above, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{69} On this passage, see further below, pp. 155–62.
[You ought to turn out as a comfort to your people, entirely long-lasting, a help to warriors. Heremod did not turn out like that for the sons of Ecgwela, the noble Scyldings; he did not develop for the joy, but for the slaughter and death of the Danish people; enraged he slew his table companions, his comrades, until, alone, he turned, the famous prince, away from the joys of men. Although mighty God had exalted him with the delights of might and with powers, promoted him above all men, yet in his heart there grew a bloodthirsty breast-hoard. Not at all did he give rings to the Danes in pursuit of fame; joyless he lived on, so that he suffered grief for that struggle, a prolonged misery for his people. Teach yourself from that; perceive manly virtue: I, old in winters, have told this tale for your sake.]

Since within *Beowulf* itself we are supplied with a complete genealogy of the Danish royal house from Scyld Scefing to Hrothgar, it seems logical to assume that Heremod must belong to an earlier period in their history. The fact that in the West-Saxon genealogy of Æthelwulf (*sub anno* 856) Heremod is given as the father of Scealdwa (Old English Scyld),70 and that it is a common trait for kings to appear in genealogies as the sons of their predecessors, whatever their connection, would support the supposition.71

Moreover, if Heremod were Scyld’s immediate predecessor his subsequent fall from grace, apparent exile, and the condition in which he abandoned his beleaguered people would all explain the plight of the Danes before Scyld’s mysterious arrival from across the water.72 The early thirteenth-century Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus obligingly offers a predecessor to Skioldus (Old English Scyld) of appropriate wickedness, but unfortunately inappropriate name, whom he calls Lotherus.73 Nonetheless, as an example of what was considered poor kingship, the parallel is instructive:

Sed nec Lotherus tolerabiliorem regem quam militem egit, ut prorsus insolentia ac scelere regnum auspiciari videretur; siquidem illustriissimum quemque vita aut opibus spoliare patriamque bonis civibus vacuefacere probitatis loco duxit, regni aemulos ratus quos nobilitate pares habuerat. Nec diu scelerum impunitus patriae consternatione perimitur, eadem spiritum eripiente, quae regnum largita fuerat.

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70 See further above, p. 101.
72 Chambers, *Introduction*, pp. 89–91
But Lother did not behave as a king any more tolerably than as a soldier, so that he seemed from the start to inaugurate his reign with arrogance and crime; he deemed it a measure of virtue to deprive everyone most honourable of life and wealth, and so to empty the land of good citizens, reckoning that his equals in rank were his rivals to power. Nor did he last unpunished for long, but he fell in a national revolt, with the same homeland snatching away his life as it had once granted the kingdom.

If they do not share a name, then Lotherus at least shares with Heremod (whose name means ‘war-mind’) something of the latter’s temperament.74

Like Sigemund, Heremod is associated not merely with ellen, but with eotenas (lines 883b and 902b). Since the latter term is used in Beowulf to signal both ‘giants’ and ‘Jutes’, it is far from clear that the same referent applies in both cases;75 many translators consider that Sigemund battled against ‘giants’, whilst Heremod came to a sticky end amongst ‘Jutes’,76 and we have already seen cases where the Beowulf-poet uses the same term to refer to different things.77 The fact that Heremod is depicted as falling ‘into the power of enemies’ (on feonda geweald, line 903a) is particularly intriguing, given that precisely the same phrase has already been used in the poem to describe the wretched fate of Grendel (lines 805b–8):

Scolde his aldorgedal 805
on dæm dæge þysses lifes
earmlc wurðan, ond se ellorgast
on feonda geweald feor siðian.

[His parting from life on that day of this life had to be wretched, and the alien spirit had to depart far into the power of fiends (or ‘enemies’).]

Norman Blake, building on this and other evidence, has argued that Heremod is here effectively damned.78 In proclaiming that Heremod was a cause of great death among the Danes (to deaðcwalum Deniga leodum, line 1712), Hrothgar is simply echoing Beowulf’s recent observation of the same trait shared by Grendel (deaðcwealm Denigea, line 1670a). Moreover, whilst Grendel, swollen with rage (gebolgen, line 723b), had destroyed Hrothgar’s hearth-companions (Hroðgares heorðgeneatas, line 1580b), the enraged Heremod had done no less to his own Danes (Breat bolgenmod beodgeneatas, line 1713). Like Grendel (dreamum bedæled, line 721a; dreama leas, line 850b; dreame bedæled, line 1275a), like Cain (gewat . . . mandream fleon, line 1264b), Heremod too

74 On the poet’s use of meaningful names, see further below, pp. 172–3.
75 See further Kaske, ‘The eotenas in Beowulf’; Stuhmiller, ‘On the Identity of the eotenas’.
76 It is intriguing to note that, according to a seventeenth-century source reported by Chambers, Introduction, p. 97, Lotherus (Heremod’s equivalent according to Saxo) was supposed to have fled to the land of the Jutes (Lotherus . . . superatus in Jutiam profugit); cf. Heremod’s exile (lines 1714–15) and his stay mid eotenum (line 902b).
77 See above, pp. 69–70.
78 Blake, ‘The Heremod Digressions’. See too n. 80 below. One might also note that according to some later versions of the myth of the death of the god Baldr (possibly alluded to in Beowulf: see further below, pp. 116–19), Hermóðr (Old English Heremod) was a son of Óðinn sent down to Hel to plead for Baldr’s return.
becomes a lonely outcast from the joys of men (ana... mondreamum from, lines 1714b–1715; dreamleas, line 1720b). Like the magnificent giant hilt without a blade that Hrothgar gazes on but cannot comprehend immediately before speaking of his predecessor’s fall from grace (lines 1687–99), Heremod is offered up to Beowulf as a dire warning of how even the finest fighters can fail.

That some kind of comparison or contrast is being drawn between Beowulf, now at the height of his powers, and the fallen idol Heremod is made strikingly clear in the second passage from the blunt comment of Hrothgar that ‘I . . . have told this tale for your sake’ (ic þis gid be þe awræc, lines 1723b–24a), words which could equally mean: ‘I . . . have told this tale about you.’ In the earlier passage about Heremod, the connection between Heremod and Beowulf is achieved through the use of parallel syntax: Heremod ‘turned out for his people, for all the nobles, a source of mortal worries’ (he his leodum wearð, / eallum æþelingum to aldorceare, lines 905b–6); Beowulf ‘turned out there to all, to the race of men, to his friends the dearer’ (He þær eallum wearð, / mæg Higelaces, manna cynne, / freondum gefægra, lines 913b–915a). The precise referent of the closing half-line of the passage is, however, decidedly ambiguous: we are simply told that ‘sin entered him’ (hine fyren onwod, line 915b). While modern editors and translators go to some lengths to reassure their readers that Heremod is intended here, an Anglo-Saxon audience might have felt less confident that Beowulf and Heremod were being juxtaposed not so much as opposites as equals.

The way in which the Beowulf-poet adopts and adapts into his poem the tales of Scyld Scefing and of Sigemund and Heremod is surely instructive of his attitudes towards the inherited tradition as a whole. Each legendary hero is held up as a point of comparison and contrast with Beowulf himself, and it cannot fairly be said that the results are always flattering. In all three cases, however, the didactic purpose is the same: to provide a fresh perspective on the past. The old tales may have been sanitised, the elements of incest and fertility cults excised, and even aspects of the story changed to protect the (not so) innocent. But the names remain, in part perhaps after the fashion and model of biblical exegetical practice, for their signification and for representation of a wider, deeper tradition, and of a legendary past that the poet cannot quite seem to bring himself to disown. The old gods themselves, however, were a different and (to Christian eyes) more dangerous matter, and if they are present in Beowulf at all, it is apparently as euhemerised ciphers, with disfigured names and disguised forms. But if we must dig deep to find traces of pagan myth in the text, it is

79 On which lines see further below, pp. 159–61.
82 For the identification of three separate myths embedded in Beowulf (all discussed below), see Dronke, ‘Beowulf and Ragnarök’, pp. 322–5.
surely striking that the Beowulf-poet should so reveal his antiquarian interests as to include them at all.

Divine gifts: the Brosinga mene and the Brísingamen

Following the Finnsburh-episode and Wealththeow’s ill-starred speech to Hrothgar about the Danish succession,83 we are told that the queen too seeks to reward Beowulf for his deeds against Grendel by presenting him with a splendid neck-ring, alongside other treasures. The poet’s description is fulsome (lines 1197–1214):84

Nænigne ic under swegle selran hyrde
hordmaðum hæleþa, syððan Hama ætwæg
to þere byrhtan byrig Brosinga mene,
sigle ond sincfæt; searoniðas fealh
Eormenrices, gecæas ecne ræd.
Þone hring hæfde Higelac Geata,
nefa Swertinges, nyhstan siðe,
siððan he under segne sinc ealgode,
wælreaf werede; hyne wyrd fornam,
syððan he for wlenco wean ahsode,
fæhðe to Frysum. He þa fraetwe wæg,
eorclanstanas ofer yða ful,
ryce þeoden; he under rande gecranc.
Gehwearf þa in Francna fæþm feorh cyninges,
breostgewædu ond se beah somod;
wyrstan wigfrecan wæl reafeden
æfter guðsceare, Geata leode,
hrawic heoldon. Heal swege onfeng.

[I never heard under the sky of a better warriors’ treasure, since Hama carried off the necklace of the Brosings to the bright stronghold, the jewel and precious setting: he endured the cunning aggression of Eormenric, chose eternal gain. Hygelac of the Geats, Swerting’s nephew, had that ring on his last expedition, when he defended his treasure under the standard, protected the plunder of the slain, when, out of pride he sought a feud from the Frisians. He carried those adornments, precious stones, over the cup of the waves, the mighty prince; he died beneath his shield. The king’s corpse then passed into the hands of the Franks, his mailcoat and the ring too; less worthy warriors plundered the slain after the slaughter; the people of the Geats occupied the place of carnage. The hall filled with sound.]

83 On which see below, pp. 173–87.
84 The manuscript reads hord mad mum at 1198a and here at 1199a; the readings given here are standard emendations. For an argument for retaining the manuscript-reading fealh (‘penetrated’) for the usual emendation to fleah (‘fled’) of line 1200b, see Hintz, ‘The “Hama” Reference in Beowulf 1197–1201’; here I follow Mitchell and Robinson, ed., Beowulf, in translating the word as ‘endured’. 
Here, not for the first time in *Beowulf*, the poet introduces an object and immediately flashes forward in its history; moreover, there seems a deliberate contrast drawn between the brave way Hama acquires the so-called *Brosinga mene*, and the rash way Hygelac loses his comparable neck-ring. We are later told in *Beowulf* that on his return to Geatland Beowulf gave the ring to Hygd (lines 2172–6), and must assume that (in a curious continuation of the alternate passing of the ring between men and women) she gave it to her reckless husband for his final trip.

The fleeting reference to Hama here is on the face of it obscure, although its very brevity seems to suggest that the *Beowulf*-poet expected his audience to be as familiar with this story as those of Scyld Scefing, Weland, Sigemund, or Heremod. Elsewhere in extant Old English poetry Hama is mentioned twice in *Widsith*, as the companion of one Wudga (who is presumably to be identified with Widia, son of Weland), while Eormenric is attested both widely in *Widsith* (as Eormanric, lines 8a, 18b, 88a, and 111b) and in *Deor* (line 21), where reference is also made explicitly to Weland (lines 1–6) and implicitly to Widia, his son (lines 8–12); Widia’s own adventures are likewise alluded to in *Waldere II* (lines 4–10). Such a nexus of interconnecting references in four Old English poems surviving by chance in three separate manuscripts seems to suggest a rich background of tradition to which poets might be expected to allude. Several of these characters are well-attested in Scandinavían tradition

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85 On the use of this technique in *Beowulf*, see below, pp. 240–2.
86 On this interpretation, see further Kaske, ‘The Sigemund-Heremod and Hama-Hygelac Passages’.
87 Cf. Mizuno, ‘The Magical Necklaje and the Fatal Corselet in *Beowulf*’.
89 It is hard to assess the extent to which material concerning any or all of these characters may have circulated in Anglo-Saxon England. Important attempts to consider the wider picture include Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*; Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England*.
90 One might note in passing that the references to *Wudgan ond Haman* (line 124b) and to *Wudga ond Hama* (line 130b) in *Widsith* form an envelope-pattern, so marking off a separate passage. The half-line immediately preceding the first of these references mentions one *Wiþergield* (line 124a), who may or may not be identical to the *Wiðergyld* named in *Beowulf*, line 2051b, on whom see further below, pp. 240–7.
91 Note that, according to *Waldere II*, Widia ‘hastened forth through the power of giants’ (line 10: *durh fifela ge[wea]ld forð onette*), since a similar fate is apparently alleged in *Beowulf* for Heremod, who ‘among the Jutes [or ‘giants’] was lured forth into the power of enemies, quickly put to death’ (lines 902b–4a: *mid Eotenum wearð / on feonda geweald forð forlacen, / snude forsended*). See further Zettersten, ed., *Waldere*, p. 27, and n. 80 above.
92 This is to assume no direct influence between the poems, although it is striking that a number of the legends common to both *Beowulf* and *Widsith* come in clusters in the latter poem, and (in general) outside the structural sequence of the text. If the concatenation of names shared with *Beowulf* in the sequence ‘X ruled (the tribe of) Y’ (*Widsith*, lines 18–34) seems impressive (*Eormanric Gotum . . . Þeoeric Froncum . . . Breoça Brondingum . . . Finn Folcwalding Fresna cynne . . . Hneaf Hodicingum . . . Sweom Ongendþeow*, lines 18b, 24a, 25a, 27, 29a, and 31b), it may simply reflect a traditional role-call. But the fact that there should immediately follow a digression on Offa (lines 35–44), similar in its expansive praise to that found in *Beowulf* (lines 1944–62), and itself followed by a self-contained allusion to the Ingeld-story (*Widsith*, lines 45–9), may suggest that the latter scenes are interpolations, like the rather out-of-place references by the poet that ‘I was with the Israelites and the Assyrians, with the Hebrews and the Indians and the Egyptians’ (*Mid Israhelum ic wæs ond mid Exsyringum / mid Ebreum ond mid Indeum ond mid Egyptum*, lines 82–3). Cf. the suggestion by Frank, ‘Germanic Legend in Old English Literature’, p. 99, that ‘Whatever its age, *Widsith* was probably not composed at any great remove, in time or place, from *Beowulf*’. For the notion that there
too, and intriguing parallels to this allusion to Hama in *Beowulf* are to be found in
the thirteenth-century *Þiðreks saga af Bern*,93 where the figure Heimir flees
the wrath of Erminrikr with a quantity of treasure and weapons and ends up in a
monastery.94 Similarly, the reference to the *Brosinga mene* has a further
analogue in Norse myth, where the goddess Freyja is the owner of the marvellous
necklace known as the *Brisingamen*, which she gained by sleeping with its
dwarf-creators, and which was stolen by Loki, but perhaps recovered by the god
Heimdallr, the first element of whose name recalls that of Hama.95 The notion
that a euhemerised version of this myth finds a reflex in *Beowulf* is perhaps less
surprising than it might first appear: as we shall see, it has been argued that
versions of other Norse myths concerning the gods Baldr and Thor, suitably
abstracted from their divine pagan setting, likewise underlie other aspects of the
Old English poem.

**Divine deaths: Herebeald and Baldr**

The childhood memory of his adoption by his maternal grandfather, Hrethel,
who brought him up alongside his own three sons, Herebeald, Hæthcyn, and
Hygelac (lines 2428–34), triggers in Beowulf, brooding before his final fight, a
lengthy meditation on the tragedy that brought Hygelac the crown (lines
2435–71):96

> ‘Wæs þam yldestan ungedefelice 2435
maeges dædum morþorbed stred,
syððan hyne Hæðcyn of hornbogan,
his freawine, flane geswenecte,
miste mercelses ond his mæg ofscet,
bródor òdernere blodigan gare. 2440
þæt wæs feohleas gefeoht, fyrenum gesyngad,
hreþore hygemeðe; sceolde hwæðre swa þeh
æðeling unwrecen ealdres linnan.
Swa bið geomorlic gomelum ceorle
gebidanne, þæt his byre ride
2445
giong on galgan, þonne he gyd wrece,
sarigne sang, þonne his sunu hangað
hrefne to hroðre, ond he him helpe ne mæg,
eald ond infrod, ænige gefremman.
Symble bið gemyndgad morna gehwylce
eaforan ellorsid; òdres ne gymed
2450

may be direct influence between surviving Old English poems, see below, pp. 163–8. See too Camp-
bell, ‘The Old English Epic Style’; *idem*, ‘The Use in *Beowulf* of Earlier Heroic Verse’.
93 Jónsson, ed., *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, chapters 288 (pp. 388–9) and 429 (pp. 579–81); Haymes, trans.,
*The Saga of Thidrek of Bern*, pp. 175–6 and 261.
95 See especially Damico, ‘Sörlaþáttr and the Hama Episode in *Beowulf*’; Orchard, *Cassell Dictionary
of Norse Myth and Legend*, p. 25.
96 The manuscript reads *helpan* at line 2448b; on the emendation to *helpe*, see above, p. 49.
to gebidanne burgum in innan
yrfewuardas, þonne se an hafað
þurh deaðes nyd ðæda gefondad.
Gesyhð sorhecarig on his suna bure
winsele westne, windge reste
reteo berofene. Ridend swefað,
haeleð in hoðman; nis þær hearpan sweg,
gomen in geardum, swylce ðær iu væron.
Gewiteð þonne on sealman, sorheleð gæleð
an æfter anum; þuhte him eall to rum,
wongas ond wicstede. Swa Wedra helm
æfter Herebealde heortan sorge
weallende wæg. Wihte ne meahte
on ðam feorbonan fæghðe gebetan;
no ðy ær he þone headorinc hatian ne meahte
laðum dædum, þeah him leof ðe ne waes.
He ða mid þere sorhge, þe him swa sar belamp,
gumdream ofgeaf, godes leoht geceas,
eaferum læfde, swa deð eadig mon,
lond ond leodbyrig, þa he of life gewat.’

[For the eldest a violent death-bed was inappropriately spread through
the deeds of his kinsman, when Hæthcyn struck down his lord and
friend with an arrow from a horn-bow; he missed his mark and shot
down his kinsman, one brother another, with a bloody shaft. That was an
assault without compensation, a wrongful act of wickedness, wearying
to the heart, nonetheless the prince had to lose his life unavenged. Like-
wise is it sad for an old man to endure, that his son should swing on the
gallows young; then he utters a dirge, a mournful song, when his son
hangs as a pleasure for the raven, and, old and very wise, he cannot bring
about any help. Every morning there is a reminder of the passing forth of
his son; he does not care to wait for another heir within the stronghold,
now that one, through the necessity of death, has experienced the last of
his deeds. Sore at heart he gazes on his son’s dwelling, the deserted
banquet-hall, a wind-swept resting-place bereft of joy; the horsemen
sleep, warriors in the grave; there is no sound of harp, happiness in the
enclosures, as there once had been. He goes to his bed, chants a song of
sorrow, one after another; everything has seemed too spacious to him,
the fields and dwelling-places. Likewise did the protector of the
Weder-Geats bear his swelling heart’s sorrow after Herebald; in no way
could he remedy the wrong against the killer, none the sooner could he
show hatred to that warrior through hostile deeds, although he was not
dear to him. With that sorrow, which, sadly had befallen him, he gave up
human joy; he chose God’s light; he left to his sons, as a fortunate man
does, his lands and strongholds, when he departed from life.]

The thematic connection made between the impossibility of either Herethel or the
unnamed father of the hanged man gaining either vengeance or recompense
for their sons seems clear enough: Hrethel would hardly wish to exact vengeance
from Hæthcyn, and it may well be, as Dorothy Whitelock has suggested, that a
judicial hanging (and therefore without recompense) is intended in the second
case.\textsuperscript{97} Whatever the precise parallels invoked,\textsuperscript{98} it is clear enough that Beowulf is here pondering the impotent grief and frustrated desire for requital of two old men in a manner which surely suggests something of his own anguish in the case of the dragon.\textsuperscript{99}

Many critics have pointed to the resemblances between the account of the killing of Herebald by his brother Hæthcyn and that of the Norse god Baldr by his brother Hǫðr;\textsuperscript{100} the similarities between the name-elements (Baldr / -beald; Hǫðr / Hæth-) certainly underline such an identification, which would then align Hrethel with the Norse god Óðinn, who was the father of both Bald and Hǫðr.\textsuperscript{101} As a god, Óðinn is intimately associated with the dead, with ravens, with death by hanging, with ritual marking with a spear, and with the art of poetry;\textsuperscript{102} it is surely striking that Beowulf here mentions that Herebald was struck with a blodigan gare (‘bloody shaft’, literally ‘bloody spear’: the term seems inappropriate for an ‘arrow from a horn-bow’ [of hornbogan . . . flane], as at lines 2437b and 2438b), and that Hrethel’s grief for his son is paralleled by that of a father who sees his son hanged, as a sport for ravens, whilst he laments by singing sad songs. The father of the hanged man is specifically described as an ‘old man’ (gomelum ceorle, line 2444b), and it is worth pointing out that Óðinn himself is several times described in similar ways.\textsuperscript{103} Other Norse parallels might be mentioned here too: according to the thirteenth-century \textit{Egils saga}, the tenth-century Icelandic poet Egill Skallagrímsson utters a similar dirge (in which he explicitly describes himself as a follower of Óðinn) for his own dead son (\textit{Egils saga}, chapter 78),\textsuperscript{104} whilst the thirteenth-century Icelander Snorri Sturluson gives an account of the events leading up to the accession of King Hugleikr (Old English Hygelac), in which there is a hunting accident in which one of two royal brothers kills the other (\textit{Ynglinga saga}, chapters 22–3).\textsuperscript{105}

With customary deftness, moreover, the \textit{Beowulf}-poet incorporates into the passage a phrase which would appear to owe more to the Christian Latin tradition, saying of Hrethel that ‘he chose God’s light’ (Godes leoht geceas, line 2469b), presumably a euphemism for ‘he died’: it is notable, however, that one

\textsuperscript{97} Whitelock, ‘\textit{Beowulf} 2444–71’.
\textsuperscript{98} Cf. Schrader, ‘The Deserted Chamber: an Unnoticed Topos in the “Father’s Lament” of \textit{Beowulf}’; Wehlau, ‘“Seeds of Sorrow”: Landscapes of Despair in \textit{The Wanderer, Beowulf’s Story of Hrethel and Sonatorrek}’.
\textsuperscript{99} For a sensitive literary reading of the episode, see Georgianna, ‘King Hrethel’s Sorrows and the Limits of Heroic Action in \textit{Beowulf}’. On the episode as a whole, see further below, pp. 227–37.
\textsuperscript{101} The same kind of onomastic connection, of course, links the god Heimdallr to the apparently human figure of Hama in \textit{Beowulf}, as we have seen.
\textsuperscript{103} In Snorri’s account of the death of Baldr, a giantess called Þókk (‘thanks’) effectively condemns Baldr to remain in Hel by refusing to weep for him, saying that: ‘alive nor dead I got no benefit from the old man’s son’ (Kýks né daðs / naut’ka ek karls sonar [Faulkes, ed., \textit{Gylfaginning}, p. 48; Jónsson, ed., \textit{Edda}, p. 68; Faulkes, trans., \textit{Edda}, p. 51]), while in the eddic \textit{Hárbarðsljóð} 2 Óðinn is derided by Þórr as ‘old man of old men’ (karl karla [Neckel, ed., \textit{Edda}, p. 78]). I am grateful to Paul Bibire for pointing out to me the significance of these references.
\textsuperscript{105} Æðalþjarnarson, ed., \textit{Heimskringla}, 1.40–3.
of the only parallel instances of such a phrase in the whole poem also comes in a passage which, it has been argued, may also allude to an event from Germanic myth. In that case, we are told that Hama ‘chose eternal gain’ (geceas ecne ræd, line 1201b)\(^{106}\) when he carried of the Brosinga mene from Ermanaric, who, we might note, was celebrated in Germanic legend for having his own son hanged.\(^ {107}\) In incorporating such phrases into passages which seem to hark back to pagan myth, albeit in a euhemerised and sanitised form, it is as if the Beowulf-poet is somehow sanctifying his appeal to the figures of pre-Christian myth and legend. But whereas many of the passages which have been identified as containing echoes of an older tradition appear in episodes which are in some sense outside the main narrative of the poem, the same cannot be said for a further striking set of analogues, which would align Beowulf with the famed pagan god and monster-slayer Thor (Þórr) himself.\(^ {108}\)

\section*{The end of it all: Beowulf and Thor}

As Ursula Dronke puts it: ‘It has often been pointed out that Beowulf’s fight with the dragon and Þórr’s fight with the World-Serpent belong to the same type of dragon-fight: a hero in defence of his people kills a marauding dragon and himself dies in the fight.’\(^ {109}\) Paraphrasing a much earlier source (the eddic poem \textit{Völsespá}, which dates to around the same period as the \textit{Beowulf}-manuscript), Snorri Sturluson describes how Thor defeats the terrible Midgard-serpent, and dies:\(^ {110}\)

\begin{quote}
Þórr ber banaorð af Miðgarðsormi ok stígr þaðan braut niu fet. Þá fellr hann dauður til jarðar fyrir eitri því, er ormrinn blæss á hann.
\end{quote}

[Thor will be the death of the Midgard-serpent, and will step nine paces away from it. Then he will fall dead to the ground because of the venom that the serpent spit at him.]

The general situation is certainly similar to that of Beowulf, fatally poisoned by the dragon’s venom, and forced to stagger away and sit down to die (lines 2711b–2717a):\(^ {111}\)

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{\(^{109}\) Dronke, ‘\textit{Beowulf} and Ragnarok’, p. 313.
\footnote{\(^{111}\) The manuscript reads \textit{beal} . . . \textit{weoll} at line 2714b, through damage to its edge.}
}
Then the wound which the earth-dragon had given him began to burn and swell; he at once perceived that in his heart there welled with deadly harm poison within. Then the prince went, so that, wise-thinking, he sat down still by the wall.

But this is not the only connection between Beowulf and Thor, the most celebrated monster-slayer in Norse myth and legend. That Thor was associated with the killing of a variety of monstrous creatures is clear from the accounts of his exploits in a variety of sources. So, for example, in the Prologue to his Gylfaginning, Snorri Sturluson gives a euhemerised account of Thor which attempts to link him back to the Classical literary tradition:

Einn konungr er þar var er nefndr Munon eða Mennon. Hann átti dóttur hófuðkonungs Priami. Sú hét Troan. Þau áttu son, hann hét Tror, þann köllum vør Þór. Hann var at uppfæzlu í Thracia með hertoga þeim er nefndr er Loricus. En er hann var tíu vetra þá tók hann við vápnnum fóður síns. Svá var hann fagr álítum, er hann kom með ðorum mônnunum sem þá er fílsbein er grafit í eik. Hár hans er fégra en gull. Þá er hann var tíolf vetra þá hafði hann fullt afl. Þá lypti hann af jórðu tíu bjarnsstíkkum þá senn ok þá drap hann Lorícum fóstra sinn, ok konu hans Lora eða Glora ok eignaði sér ríkit Thracia. Þat köllum vør Prúðheim. Þá fór hann víða um lænd ok kannaði allar heims hálfur ok sigraði einn saman alla berserki ok risa ok einn inn mesta dreka ok morg dýr.

[There was a king who was there [in Troy] whose name was Munon or Mennon; he was married to the daughter of the high-king, Priam (she was called Troan). They had a son, who was called Tror, but we call him Thor. He was raised up in Thrace by a commander, who was called Loricus, and when he was ten he inherited his father’s weapons. He was as fair in appearance, when he came among other men, as when ivory is inlaid in oak. His hair is fairer than gold. When he was twelve, he had reached his full strength. Then he lifted up twelve bear-skins at once from the ground, killed his foster-father Loricus and his wife Lora or Glora, and took possession of the kingdom of Thrace. We call it Thrudheim. Then he travelled widely across the lands and explored all the continents and alone conquered all berserks and giants and the single greatest dragon and many animals.]

The association with bears here is one that recurs in tales about Thor, and

112 On Thor in general, see Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North, pp. 75–105; Orchard, Cassell Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend, pp. 161–3.
114 See, for example, Coffin, ‘Beowulf and its Relationship to Norse and Finno-Uguric Beliefs and Narratives’; Jorgensen, ‘The Two-Troll Variant of the Bear’s Son Folktales in Hálfdanar saga
links the god with the so-called ‘bear’s son’ folk-motif first studied in detail by Friedrich Panzer and detected by him in *Beowulf*.115 This is emphatically not to revive the notion, put forward at its most extreme by Skeat,116 that Beowulf himself is a bear, or that his name means ‘bee-wulf’ and so ‘enemy of the bee’, likewise a bear.117 But Beowulf is at his most bear-like in his slaying of the Frankish champion Dæghrefn, apparently crushed to death to avenge the slaying of Hygelac (lines 2501–8a):118

‘Syððan ic for dugeðum Dæghrefne wearð
to handbonan, Huga cempan;
nalles he ða fratwe Frescyninge,
breostwoerðunge, bringan moste,
ac in compe gecrong cumbles hyrde, 2505
æþeling on elne; ne was eeg bona,
ac him hildegrap heortan wylmas,
banhus gebræc.’

[‘Since before the hosts I became the hand-slayer of Dæghrefn, the champion of the Hugas. Not at all was he permitted to bring back the accoutrements, breast-adornments, to the Frisian king, but he fell on the battle-field, the standard-bearer, the prince in valour; no sword was his slayer, but a battle-grip shattered the surgings of his heart, his bone-house.’]

In killing Dæghrefn as he had disposed of Grendel, without recourse to a weapon of any kind,119 Beowulf aligns himself again with the god Thor, who elsewhere famously wrestles Elli (‘old age’) and is never seen wielding a sword.120 Certainly, the notion that Thor engaged in lone combat with a variety of monsters, culminating in ‘the single greatest dragon’, matches what we find in *Beowulf*; moreover, still other traditions associated with Thor contain parallels for some puzzling details in the Old English poem.

So, for example, when Beowulf recounts his adventures in Denmark to Hygelac,121 it has often been noted that a number of new elements are introduced,122 among which is the name of the Geat devoured by Grendel, and (immediately afterwards) a description of the monster’s marvellous glof (lines 2085b–2088):

\[\text{Brönufóstra and Gríms saga loðínkinna’; Stitt, ‘Beowulf’ and the Bear’s Son; Wachsler, ‘Grettir’s Fight with a Bear: another Neglected Analogue of Beowulf in the Grettis Ságr[aga] Ásmundarsonar’}.\]

\[\text{Panzer, \textit{Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte}.}\]

\[\text{Skeat, ‘On the Signification of the Monster Grendel in the Poem of Beowulf’}.\]

\[\text{Cf. Klaeber, ed., \textit{Beowulf}, pp. xxv–xxvii. More likely, the etymology of Beowulf’s name is Beow-wulf, ‘the wolf of (the god) Beow’, cf. the common Norse name Þórólfr ‘the wolf of (the god) Þórr’}.\]

\[\text{The manuscript reads \textit{fres cyning} at line 2503b and \textit{incempan} at line 2505a, but the emendations accepted here are common ones}.\]

\[\text{On Dæghrefn in general, see, for example, Bonjour, ‘The Problem of Dæghrefn’}.\]


\[\text{See in general Looze, ‘Frame Narratives and Fictionalization’}.\]

\[\text{See, for example, Klaeber, ed., \textit{Beowulf}, p. 201}.\]
Glof hung, wide and wonderful, secure with skilful bonds; it was entirely adorned with cunning, with a devil’s skill and dragon-skins.’

That the name of the Geat devoured by Grendel should be Hondscio (line 2075a), an apparently transparent term for ‘glove’ (compare Modern German Handschuh), is evidently another example of the Beowulf-poet’s tendency to etymologise names. It has been noted that there are parallels between this passage in Beowulf and a much later Icelandic tale of a glove, a cunningly wrought food-sack, and the god Thor who finds himself unfortunately inside the one and outside the other. The Icelander Snorri Sturluson describes a humiliating encounter that Thor had at the hands of a huge giant, Skrýmir, apparently basing his tale on older poetic sources. According to Snorri’s account, Thor, travelling towards the land of the giants with two companions, finds himself without shelter in a forest, and is forced to improvise:

‘When it got dark, they looked for a place to spend the night, and found for themselves a very big hall with a door in one end that was as wide as the hall itself. They looked for night-shelter there. But in the middle of the night there was a huge earthquake: the ground shook and shuddered under them, and the building trembled. Then Thor stood up and called to his companions, and they looked around and found a side-chamber on the right, half-way down the hall, and went in. Thor sat by the door, and the others were further inside, and they were terrified, but Thor gripped the shaft of his hammer and prepared to defend himself. They heard a great groaning and roaring.’

At dawn, Thor finds the snoring giant Skrýmir, and realises that they have spent the night in his glove (evidently more of a mitten, since there are apparently no fingers to it, and the ‘side-chamber’ turns out to be the thumb). Skrýmir offers

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123 On which see below, pp. 172–3.


125 Thor’s taking refuge inside a glove (and being too afraid even to fart) is referred to in the eddic Hárbarðsljóð 26 (Neckel, ed., Edda, p. 82), while his inability to untie a food-sack is referred to in Lokasenna 60 (Neckel, ed., Edda, p. 108).

Thor and his companions his food-sack, and goes back to sleep, but Thor is quite unable to untie it: ‘he couldn’t loosen a single knot, or move a strap-end so that it was looser than before’ (engi knút fekk hann leyst ok engi álarendann hreyft, svá at þá væri lausari en áðr). While Skrýmir’s glove, like Grendel’s, could certainly be described as ‘wide and wonderful’ (sid ond syllic, line 2086a) his food-bag, like Grendel’s, is surely ‘secure with skilful bonds’ (searobendum fæst, line 2086b). The putative links between Beowulf and Thor are the more intriguing since it has long been recognised that euhemerised versions of Norse myth can be detected in a range of sagas,127 much as elements of the death of Baldr or Heimdallr’s theft of the Brísingamen can (as we have seen) appear in Ynglinga saga or Þiðreks saga. For Christian Icelanders, as for Christian Anglo-Saxons, the myths and legends of the pagan past could apparently afford literary opportunities that were not to be missed, and it is to these later sagas that we now turn.

Aftermath: ‘Beowulf’ and later Icelandic sagas

For more than a hundred years, a wide range of Icelandic sagas have routinely been compared with various aspects of Beowulf.128 Although parallels and analogues have also been sought for Beowulf among a number of Celtic sources,129

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127 See, for example, Harris, ‘The Masterbuilder Tale in Snorri’s Edda and in Two Sagas’.

not to mention those from still wider afield, in general these have seemed less convincing than those detected among Norse texts. If the fourteenth-century 

_Grettis saga_ has been most closely studied in this respect, over the years the search for parallels has become increasingly focused on the so-called ‘legendary sagas’ ([fornaldar›gur]), several of which seem to share a striking number of narrative details with those found in _Beowulf_. In particular, the so-called ‘two troll’ motif seems to provide the closest comparisons to the first two monster-fights in _Beowulf_.

In general in these tales, the hero resolves to break into the mound of a _draugr_ or walking corpse, which is usually situated by water; although accompanied by locals, the hero goes on alone, often descending by rope and emerging into a lit chamber. The fight with the _draugr_ is a hand-to-hand affair, until the hero spies a sword in the gravemound, and uses it to kill and decapitate the _draugr_. The hero’s companions have by this point fled, leaving the hero to emerge from the gravemound carrying spoils. A typical account of such a battle is that in the fourteenth-century _Hrómundar saga Gripssonar_, chapter 4:

[They came from the west to Valland, and found the grave-mound, and immediately began to break it open; and after six days they came upon a trap-door]
in the mound. There they saw that a big fiend was sitting on a seat, black and
fat, all clad in gold, so that it flashed. He was roaring loudly and blowing on a
fire . . . Then Hrómundr climbed down by the rope; it was then night. When he
came down, he gathered together alot of treasure, and tied it to the end of the
rope. Práininn had been king over Valland in days gone by, and had won all his
victories by magic: he had performed much evil, and when he was so old, that
he could not fight any longer, he had caused himself to be shut up in the
mound alive, along with much treasure. Now Hrómundr saw where a sword
was hanging up on a pillar. He took it down, put it on, and marched up to the
seat, saying: ‘It’s time for me to leave the mound now, since there is no one to
stop me. But what’s your problem, you there, old bloke? Can’t you see that I’m
carrying off your treasure, while you just sit still, you son of a bitch? What
were you thinking of when you ignored me taking your sword and necklace
and many other treasures?’ . . . The draugr replied: ‘It’s not brave to take a
sword from me when I am unarmed; I’d rather test my strength wrestling with
you.’ Hrómundr threw the sword down and relied on his strength.]

There are a number of very similar episodes scattered throughout the sagas;136
the broad similarities of narrative detail to what we find in Beowulf will be clear.
But it is important to stress that it is not simply in the case of the
monster-fights that one can find parallels between much later fornaldarsögur
and Beowulf. Any assessment of Beowulf’s aquatic prowess will rest principally
on the interpretation of three key episodes, namely the encounter with Breca
(lines 506–81a), the descent into the monster-mere (lines 1494b–1512a), and the
retreat from Frisia (lines 2359–62).137 In practice, all three episodes have come
under extensive scrutiny, and what might be termed the more ‘traditional’ view,
namely that Beowulf’s exhibits marvellous or superhuman characteristics in
these episodes, has been steadily eroded.138 In particular, it has been argued that
the encounter with Breca is a rowing-match, rather then the swimming-contest
often assumed; that the descent into the monster-mere does not take all day, as
sometimes supposed; and that the retreat from Frisia, in which Beowulf carries
off thirty coats of mail from his fallen comrades, is accomplished by boat, rather
than (as some would say) by swimming across the sea.139 But it is still striking to

136 See, for example, Barðar saga Snæfellsáss, chapter 20; Egils saga ok Ásmundar, chapter 7; Grettis
saga, chapter 18; Gull-Böris saga, chapter 3; Harðar saga ok hólmverja, chapter 15; Saxo
Grammaticus, Gesta Danorum, V.135. Invaluable for tracking down such themes in the sagas is
Boberg, Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature.

137 Perhaps also to be included is the night-time battle with those ‘water-monsters’ (nicoras) that
Beowulf, in his opening address to Hrothgar, reports himself as having slain (lines 419–24a),
although there may be some overlap between this tale and the later account of Beowulf’s encounter
with Breca.

138 See, for example, Anderson, ‘Beowulf’s Retreat from Frisia’; Earl, ‘Beowulf’s Rowing-Match’;
Frank, ‘“Mere” and “Sund”: Two Sea-Changes in Beowulf’; Greenfield, ‘A Touch of the
Monstrous’; Griffith, ‘Beowulf 1495: hwil ðæges = momentum temporis?’; Jorgensen, ‘Beowulf’s
Swimming Contest with Breca’; Lawrence, ‘The Breca Episode in Beowulf’; McNamara, ‘Legends
of Breca and Beowulf’; Buchanan, ‘The Aquatic Contest’; Robinson, ‘Elements of the Marvellous’;
idem, ‘Beowulf’s Retreat from Frisia’; Wentersdorf, ‘Beowulf’s Adventure with Breca’; idem,
‘Beowulf’s Withdrawal from Frisia’.

139 See below, pp. 230–2.
note that while there are a large number of analogues for Beowulf’s supposed swimming-prowess to be found in the Norse fornaldarsögur, parallels for his alleged skill at rowing are harder to adduce.140

A particularly intriguing analogue for Beowulf’s aquatic adventures is found in Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana, chapter 9;141 the parallel is the more noteworthy since the saga in question also contains in an earlier chapter an analogue for part of the so-called ‘two-troll’ story-type, in which a hero descends into a grave-mound alone, battles with the resident undead warrior (draugr), decapitates him with a short sword (sax), and escapes with treasure.142 The relevant passage reads as follows:

‘Egill óx upp með hirð fóður síns, þar til at hann var tólf vetra gamall. Hann var mikill fyrir sér ok östýrilátr, kappsamr ok ódæll. Hann lagði lag sitt við drengi ok lagðist út á skóga at skjóta dýr ok fugla. Vatn mikit var í skóginum, ok várú þar í eyjar margar. Par föru þeir Egill á sund jafnan, því at þeir vóndu sík mjók við íþróttir. Eitt sinn reddi Egill um við þá, hvver lengst mundi geta lagist í vatnit, því at svá var langr vegrinn í þá ey, sem first var landi, at hana sá eigi, utan þeir gengi upp í há tré til. Nú leggjast þeir á vatnit, ok várú saman þrír tígr. Skyldi þar hvver eftir vera, sem hann treysti sér eigi lengra at fara. Leggjast þeir nú um vatnit, ok várú sum sundin breið mjók. Egill var fljótastr á sundinu, ok gat engi fylgt honum. Ok er þeir várú langt frá landi komnir, þá kom þoka svá myrk, at engi sá annan, ok gerði þá vind kaldan. Villtust þeir nú á sundinu, ok eigi vissi Egill, hvat af sínum mýnum varð. Hvarflaði hann nú um vatnit tvau dægr. Kom hann þá at landi ok var svá máttdreginn, at hann varð at skríða á land, ok reytti hann á sik mosa ok lák þar um nöttina.

[‘Egill grew up at his father’s court, until he was twelve years old; he was self-willed and ungovernable, aggressive and unmanageable. He hooked up with a gang of lads and they used to go out in the woods to shoot animals and birds. There was a large lake in the woods, with many islands in it, and Egill and his gang often went swimming there, because they had trained themselves for all sorts of sports. One day Egill brought up the question among them of who could get the furthest into the lake, because it was such a long distance to the furthest island that it couldn’t be seen unless they climbed a high tree. So they set off into the lake, thirty all told: each of them was to go only as far as he felt confident. So they set off into the lake, and some of the distances between the islands were very long. Egill was the swiftest swimmer, and no one could keep up with him. When they had come a long way from the shore, a mist came down so dark, that none of them could see the others, and the wind grew cold. Now they drifted in their swimming, and Egill did not know, what had become of his companions. He wandered around in the lake for two days. Then he came to land, and was so exhausted, that he had to crawl ashore; he covered himself with moss and lay there overnight.]

140 See especially Jorgensen, ‘Beowulf’s Swimming Contest with Breca’.
141 Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana is ed. Guðni Jónsson, Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda, III.323–65; and translated by Pálsson and Edwards, Seven Viking Romances, pp. 240–1.
This aquatic adventure has a number of close parallels to the encounter with Breca as seen from Beowulf’s own point of view: a test of endurance rather than a challenge-match *per se*, in which the strongest individual becomes separated by bad weather, drifts alone for two days, and is finally washed ashore exhausted. The number of Egill’s fellow-swimmers is of interest too, since the thirty lads in Egill’s gang equate both to the number of mail-shirts Beowulf recovers from Frisia, and to Beowulf’s putative strength: we are told explicitly that he has the strength of thirty men in his grip (lines 379b–381a).

The fact that both in his encounter with Breca and in his descent into the monster-mere Beowulf is wearing a mail-shirt that apparently prevents the various water monsters from piercing his flesh is of some interest in this context too, since later on in *Egils saga einhenda* (chapter 15) reference is made to a shirt that no weapon could bite, and which caused its wearer never to tire when swimming. Several of the *fornaldarsögur* contains cases of shirts with similar aquatic and defensive properties. The most elaborate example of such a shirt is found in *Orvar-Odds saga*, chapter 11, where the eponymous hero is offered a magical shirt by a mysterious and beautiful woman he meets in a forest-clearing; she describes its properties in detail:


[‘You’ll never get cold in it, either at sea or on land; you’ll never get tired swimming, and fire won’t harm you, and hunger won’t afflict you, and iron won’t bite on you, and it’ll keep you from everything except one thing only.’ ‘And what’s that?’ said Oddr. ‘Iron will bite you, if you’re running away, even though you’re wearing the shirt.’ ‘I’ll have better things to do in battle than run away’, said Oddr, ‘how soon can it be made?’ ‘Next summer’, she said, ‘a year to the day, when the sun is in the south, as now. Then we shall meet here in the same clearing.’]

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143 For a different view, cf. Puhvel, ‘The Aquatic Contest in *Hálfdanar saga Brunfóstra*’, p. 135; Puhvel is arguing against Jorgensen, ‘Beowulf’s Swimming Contest with Breca’.
144 See further below, pp. 144–6.
145 On this notion as a theme in the sagas see, for example, Beard, ‘Á þá bitu engi járn: a Brief Note on the Concept of Invulnerability in the Old Norse Sagas’.
146 The shirt is made by the Russian princess Bekkhildr: *Bekkhildr hafði gert eina skyrtu, ok festi ekki vápn á, ok eigi mátti sá á sundi maðast, er í henni var*.
147 *Orvar-Odds saga* is ed. Guðni Jónsson, *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, II.199–363; as with *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, it is worth recording that *Orvar-Odds saga* likewise contains further analogues to connect it to *Beowulf*.
In fact, however, the majority of such shirts in the fornaldarsgur confer upon their wearer the advantages of that in Egils saga, namely invulnerability to weapons and tirelessness at swimming,\textsuperscript{149} precisely those elements which are so important in the context of Beowulf. One can only suppose that as other fornaldarsgur are identified which appear to provide analogues to Beowulf, perhaps in areas other than swimming-prowess, invulnerability, and monster-slaying, a better understanding of the interrelationships between these texts will emerge. If the notion that Beowulf could have directly influenced Icelandic sagas still seems far-fetched to many, one notes that among the earliest settlers to Iceland was one Bjólfr, whose name appears to be cognate with that of Beowulf.\textsuperscript{150} Moreover, if Beowulf had any currency in Anglo-Saxon England, as now seems not unlikely,\textsuperscript{151} it remains possible that some aspects of the story could have travelled to Iceland with the early settlers, many of whom came from the British Isles or at least sojourned there in transit. As with so many aspects of the study of Beowulf, the success of scholars of the past in identifying parallels provides a keen incitement to future generations to do more.

Beowulf, however, is not the only surviving Old English poem to draw on aspects of the Germanic legendary past: Deor, The Finnsburh Fragment, Waldere, and Widsith certainly do, and Wulf and Eadwacer may.\textsuperscript{152} Nor may Beowulf be the only surviving Old English poem to draw on aspects of Germanic myth, if the reference to the fact that ‘all creation wept’ at the death of Christ in the Dream of the Rood (weop eall gesceaft, line 55b) really does reflect the weeping of all creation required at the death of the Baldr.\textsuperscript{153} In the latter case, one notes that the apparent reference to a pagan god has been utterly sanctified by its context, just as in Beowulf, as we have seen, the apparent references to the death of Baldr or the Heimdallr’s theft are likewise christianised.\textsuperscript{154} And if by giving his life in defence of his people when he defeats the dragon Beowulf may well reflect aspects of the monster-slaying pagan god Thor, it is important

\textsuperscript{149} A handy check-list of such garments in eleven separate (though doubtless related) fornaldarsgur is found in Andersson and Gade, Morkinskinna, p. 424, n. 10. Apart from Egils saga einhenda and Orvar-Ödds saga, the sagas in question are Gongu-Hrólfs saga (chapters 4, 30, and 32); Hálfdanar saga Brongafstra (chapter 8); Hervarar saga (chapter 3); Ragnars saga loóbrókar (chapter 15), Sögubrot af forkonungum (chapter 4), Sórla saga sterka (chapters 3, 6, and 18); Volsunga saga (chapter 42); þàtr af Ragnars sonum (chapter 3); Þorsteins þatr bojarmagns (chapters 3 and 5). See too Holtsmark, ‘Olav den Hellige’.

\textsuperscript{150} Benediktssson, ed., Landnámabók, II.306/4–8; see too Einarsson, ‘Bjólfr and Grendill’; idem, ‘Beowulfian Place-Names’.

\textsuperscript{151} On the notion that some extant Old English poems echo Beowulf directly, see below, pp. 163–8. As evidence that some scribe or other appeared to recognise Beowulf’s prime significance within the poem, one might note the extensive capitalisation of his name at the beginning of fitts XXI and XXII (see Table II above, pp. 94–5), as well as the apparent miscopying of Beow as Beowulf in lines 18a and 53b (see further above, pp. 103–4). Cf. Cassidy, ‘Knowledge of Beowulf in Its Own Time’; Weinstock, ‘Comment on “Knowledge of Beowulf in Its Own Time”’.

\textsuperscript{152} See, for example, Aertsen, ‘Wulf and Eadwacer: a Woman’s cri de coeur’; Bouman, ‘Leodum is minum: Beadhild’s complaint’; D’Aronco, ‘Wulf and Eadwacer: analisi del testo’; Hough, ‘Wulf and Eadwacer: a Note on ungelic’; North, ‘Metre and Meaning in Wulf and Eadwacer’.

\textsuperscript{153} See, for example, North, Heathen Gods in Old English Literature, pp. 287–303.

\textsuperscript{154} See above, pp. 114–19.
to realise that his self-sacrifice also reflects that of a figure from a quite different tradition, namely Christ. It is therefore to that imported, written, Latin, Christian tradition that we now turn to seek other sources in the background to *Beowulf*.

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155 As Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, p. li, puts it: ‘We might even feel inclined to recognize features of the Christian Savior in the destroyer of hellish fiends, the warrior brave and gentle, blameless in thought and deed, the king that dies for his people.’ See further below, pp. 147–9.
Religion and Learning

The Christian background to ‘Beowulf’

The older view that the surviving text of Beowulf represents a Christian re-working (or perhaps several re-workings) of an originally pagan text is no longer in vogue, just as the efforts of Beowulf-scholars are no longer primarily directed towards the recovery of such a putative ‘original’ text. In this respect, the developing study of Beowulf simply reflects that of other Old English poems, such as The Wanderer, long held to be an originally secular poem to which a Christian coda has been added, or Deor, which if it contains unmistakable references to the pre-Christian legendary past, is often given a Christianised, even Boethian reading. But there remain a number of issues of crucial importance to any understanding of the poem, namely the extent to which the Beowulf-poet may have been influenced by the literate Latinate culture that came into Anglo-Saxon England alongside Christianity itself, and the pervading effects of which on the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition have been increasingly recognised in recent years. But this is not to say that Latin culture (any more than Christianity) was transmitted only through the medium of written texts: Christian-Latin tales, motifs, and ideas could as easily have been disseminated orally in much the same way as those of the secular heroic tradition, and it is often difficult to determine parallels of theme or even wording that

1 See further above, pp. 6–7.

2 Interesting (if very different) overviews of the way in which successive generations of Anglo-Saxon scholars have tended to focus on the background to Old English texts, rather than the texts themselves, are found in Frantzen, Desire for Origins; Frantzen and Venengoni, ‘The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon Studies’; Stanley, Imagining the Past.

3 The comments of Anderson, The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons, pp. 159–60, can be taken as symptomatic of such an approach: ‘The final lines of the poem, most likely a sop to Christianity from the hands of some pious scribe, succeed in being an anticlimax, for the heart of the poem is beating with triumphant pessimism’. For more recent criticism of The Wanderer, see Orchard, ‘Re-reading The Wanderer’.

4 See, for example, Bolton, ‘Boethius, Alfred, and Deor Again’; many of the author’s same preoccupations are evident in his later ‘Boethius and a Topos in Beowulf’.

5 The primary resources for assessing the extent of this influence on Anglo-Saxon literary culture are the two international research-projects SASLC and Fontes Anglo-Saxonici (on which, see the sites listed in section C of the Bibliography). Also crucial for assessing the manuscript evidence relating to this material is Gneuss, Handlist. See too Ogilvy, Books Known to the English, 597–1066; idem, ‘Books Known to the English, A.D. 597–1066: Addenda et Corrigenda’.
are the result of direct borrowing or simply part of some wider pattern of influence.

As for *Beowulf*, there seems no getting rid of the poet’s clear references to the biblical tales of Cain and Abel (lines 107–10 and 1261b–1265a) and the subsequent story of the Flood (lines 1260–1b and 1688b–1693) without doing irreparable damage to the transmitted text, and the debate has instead shifted to a consideration of the precise extent to which *Beowulf* has not simply been shaped by a Christian world-view; but informed by the imported, literate, and Latinate learning that the Conversion brought to Anglo-Saxon England. The difficulty of assessing how far *Beowulf* can be described as a truly ‘Christian’ poem has exercised many of the finest and most subtle of *Beowulf*-scholars: it might be noted that if Friedrich Klaeber can identify in *Beowulf* a type of Christ, J. R. R. Tolkien, in the course of perhaps the most influential paper ever written on the poem, can still express doubts about the ‘originality’ of some of the Christian passages in the text. Even in the introduction to one of the most recent editions of *Beowulf*, produced by two of the most distinguished *Beowulf*-scholars of their generation, the editors, Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson, feel obliged to offer ‘Two Views of *Beowulf*’, in which Mitchell downplays the Christian elements and Robinson emphasises them.

But if *Beowulf* is reckoned free from the influence of the Christian-Latin tradition, then it is the only such text in the *Beowulf*-manuscript. Indeed, in

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8 Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, p. li (quoted above, p. 129). Others of Klaeber’s works, notably the four parts that make up *Die christlichen Elemente im *Beowulf**, pursue the theme. There is a convenient translation of all four parts of *Die christlichen Elemente* by Battles (‘The Christian Elements in *Beowulf*’), and it is to the latter text that I shall primarily refer.


10 Mitchell and Robinson, ed., *Beowulf*, pp. 36–8. It is interesting to note that in the course of brief analyses of broadly similar length, Mitchell uses the word ‘Christian’ three times (always citing the opinions of others), Robinson ten times.

11 See further above, pp. 22–5.
their range of unquestioned indebtedness to a variety of Latin works (secular, biblical, and hagiographical), the other texts in the manuscript provide a useful index to the sorts of material on which (at least some have argued) the Beowulf-poet may have drawn. It is important to stress, however, that (unlike all the other texts in the manuscript), no single Latin source has ever been certainly identified for Beowulf (nor is any likely to be), and only analogues have ever been seriously suggested;\(^1\) and it seems quite possible that any Latinate elements in the poem may have been mediated through the vernacular. Therefore, any consideration of the putative influence of Christian or Latin texts on Beowulf needs also to consider apparent parallels between the poem and a variety of other, more explicitly Christian texts composed in Old English, most of which themselves are heavily endebted to biblical and patristic thought and diction.

**Classical words and Christian contexts: Latin literary analogues for ‘Beowulf’**

It is a curious fact of literary history that the application of so-called ‘oral-formulaic theory’ to Old English has given new life to the moribund practice of drawing comparisons between Homeric epic and Beowulf,\(^1\) although no one has yet been so bold as to take up cudgels again in arguing for direct influence from the Greek, or even for indirect influence mediated through texts such as the *Ilias Latina*.\(^1\) Still more surprising, perhaps, given the vast amount of evidence for first-hand knowledge and study of Vergil in Anglo-Saxon England,\(^1\) is the fact that the whole question of the influence of the Aeneid on the Beowulf-poet has become more or less a dead letter, ever since Tom Burns

\(^1\) For a useful discussion of the difference between sources and analogues, see Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*, pp. 9–11. Here, I use the term ‘analogue’ to describe a parallel where intentional borrowing in one direction or the other cannot be demonstrated; the burden of evidence required of a ‘source’ is much higher: the would-be source-hunter must (rather like a detective) be able to demonstrate means, motive, and opportunity for borrowing to have taken place, rather than any more superficial (not to say circumstantial) evidence. See too Anderson, ‘Sources and Analogues’.

\(^1\) Gneuss, *Handlist*, nos. 535 and 664, lists two manuscripts of the *Ilias Latina* written or owned in England up to 1100, but both date around the beginning of the twelfth century, and are too late for detailed consideration here.

\(^1\) See, for example, Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, pp. 130–5 and the references there cited.
Haber presented the case most fully in English in 1931, building on (but certainly not improving) the pioneering work of Klaeber, which still stands in sore need of balanced reassessment. Occasional voices timidly suggest the possible influence of other Classical poets, but strong general objections have been raised, and there the matter largely rests.

The main stumbling-block to widespread acceptance of Vergilian influence on *Beowulf* has been that none of the parallels suggested to date seems sufficiently specific. Klaeber pointed out long ago that an excellent parallel to *Beowulf*’s comment that ‘each of us shall experience an end of life in the world: let him who can gain glory before death’ (*ure æghwylc sceal ende gebidan worolde lifes; wyerce se pe mote domes ær deaþe*, lines 1386–8a) is found in Jupiter’s comment that ‘to each there stands his own day; to all the time of life is short and irretrievable; but to extend one’s fame with deeds, that is the task of valour’ (*stat sua cuique dies, breve et irreperabile tempus / omnibus est vitae; sed famam extendere factis, hoc virtutis opus*, *Aeneid* X.467–9), but such a sentiment seems simply a heroic commonplace. After a characteristically sensitive and thoughtful review of the evidence, Jack Niles finds the closest parallel between *Beowulf* and the *Aeneid* to lie in the shared use of the phrase ‘they all fell silent’, just before a key speech (*swigedon ealle*, line 1699b; *conticuere omnes*, *Aeneid* II.1). While such a parallel is undoubtedly interesting, however, it might be pointed out that even if a parallel phrase in *Andreas* (*swigodon ealle*, line 762b) might be attributable to the direct influence on that poem of *Beowulf*, the existence of a pair of parallel phrases in the Old Norse Poetic Edda (*þegþu allir*, found in *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* 15.1 and *Sigurðarkvida in skamma* 50.1) might suggest a wider currency for the phrase in Germanic verse. What is required is a connection still more specific.

A more promising line of enquiry might consider how Vergilian influence might have been mediated through later texts, and to compare the ways in which later authors and poets appropriated the pagan heroic material of the Classical past into undoubtedly Christian contexts. It has become increasingly clear in recent years the extent to which the authors of Christian-Latin epic, such as Juvenecus, Caelius Sedulius, Prudentius, and Arator, formed the staple of the Anglo-Saxon school curriculum, and of themselves provide a perfect model for the use of heroic verse for a Christian didactic purpose. Likewise, a Vergilian background for at least one curious text with a well-documented connection with *Beowulf* is assured. The *Liber monstrorum* (‘Book of monsters’) is an

17 Special mention should be made of Schrader, ‘*Beowulf*’s Obsequies and the Roman Epic’; *idem*, ‘Sacred Groves, Marvellous Waters, and Grendel’s Abode’. See too Cornelius, ‘Palus inamabilis’.  
18 Cf. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age*, pp. 73–6; Nist, ‘*Beowulf* and the Classical Epics’.  
21 See further below, pp. 163–8.  
extraordinary work, apparently composed by an Anglo-Saxon around the beginning of the eighth century, which meticulously catalogues more than 120 ‘monsters’, divided into three books by type, namely whether they are humanoid, bestial, or serpentine.\(^\text{24}\) Even this tripartite division might suggest a broad parallel with the monster-fights in *Beowulf*, and indeed the *Liber monstrorum* shares a number of curious details with the poem. In only its second chapter, the *Liber monstrorum* mentions Hygelac by name, albeit as a monster (I.2):

> Et fiunt monstra mirae magnitudinis, ut rex Higlacus, qui imperauit Getis et a Francis occisus est, quem equus a duodecimo aetatis anno portare non potuit. Cuius ossa in Rheni fluminis insula, ubi in Oceanum prorumpit, reseruata sunt, et de longinquo uenientibus pro miraculo ostenduntur.

[And there are monsters of an amazing size, like King Hygelac, who ruled the Geats and was killed by the Franks, whom no horse could carry from the age of twelve. His bones are preserved on an island in the River Rhine, where it breaks into the Ocean, and they are shown as a wonder to travellers from afar.]

Apart from exaggerating Hygelac’s size in a way familiar from a number of saga-narratives,\(^\text{25}\) the author of the *Liber monstrorum* seems keen to align Hygelac with a whole race of giants, of whom he later notes (I.54):

> Gigantes enim ipsos tam enormis alebat magnitudo ut eis omnia maria pedum gressibus transmeabila fuisse perhibeat. Quorum ossa in litoribus et in terrarum latebris, ad indicium vastae quantitatis eorum, saepe comperta leguntur.

[Indeed giants used to grow to such an enormous size that it is said that all the sea were passable to them on foot. And their bones are often found, according to books, on the shores and in the recesses of the world, as an indication of their vast size.]

That the bones of such creatures are found on the sea-shore seems an allusion to the narrative of their destruction in the Flood, an episode mentioned in the *Prologue* to the work.\(^\text{26}\) Other heroes from the pagan past likewise turn up as monsters, notably the famed monster-slayer Hercules, who appears no fewer than seven times, in all three books (I.12; II.1, 6, and 14; III.1, 3, and 20).

Recent work on the sources of the *Liber monstrorum* has shown it to be a highly sophisticated piece of work, based on a careful combination of three kinds of material, namely Christian prose sources, chiefly Isidore and Augustine; pagan prose sources, chiefly relating to the heroic exploits of Alexander the Great; and

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\(^{25}\) The classic example of a saga-hero of this type is Gõngu-Hrólfr (‘Walker-Hrólfr’), whom (as his name suggests) no horse could carry; cf. Jónsson, ed., *Fornaldar sögur Nordurlanda*, III.173.

Vergil, including the commentary tradition. The Christian author implicitly undermines and condemns the pagan and heroic material that he has apparently collected with such care, and presents the whole piece as a warning against the seductive power of pagan literature.

Few of the individual chapters of the Liber monstrorum remain unsourced (that describing Hygelac being one of them), but among those few is an account of an extraordinarily venomous creature (II.23):

Bestia autem illa inter omnes belus dirissima fertur, in qua tantam ueneni copiam adfirmant ut eam sibi leones quamuis inualidioris feram corporis, timeant, et tantam uim eius uenenum habere arbitrantur, ut eo licet ferri acies intacta liquescat.

[But that beast is said to be amongst the fiercest of all brutes, in which they assert that there is such a quantity of venom that lions fear it although it is an animal of weaker body, and they reckon that its poison has such strength, that the cutting-edge even of iron, dipped in it, melts.]

Such a creature seems to share this curious quality with Grendel, whose blood likewise causes the blade of the giant sword to melt, an image of which the Beowulf-poet gives two descriptions, first in his own voice (lines 1605b–1617), and then in Beowulf’s (lines 1666b–1668a). The accounts of the melting of what the poet calls ‘an ancient sword made by giants’ (ealdsweord eotenisc, line 1558a) and Beowulf calls ‘an ancient and mighty sword’ (ealdsweord eacen, line 1663a), are strikingly similar; Beowulf’s much briefer description has a number of unmistakable echoes of the earlier version by the poet, especially the simple statement that ‘the decorated weapon burnt up’, which is repeated almost verbatim (forbarn brogdenmæl, line1667a, cf. forbarn brodenmæl, line 1616a; hildebil, line 1666b, cf. wigbil, line 1607a; blod . . . hatost heaposwata, line 1667b–1668a, cf. heaposwate . . . wes þæt blod to þæs hat, lines 1606a and 1616b). In fact, Vergil may have (inadvertently) suggested the image of the melting sword to both the author of the Liber monstrorum and to the Beowulf-poet (or indeed to one via the other): long ago, Klaeber suggested that the fact that after Beowulf decapitates Grendel the giant sword ‘entirely melted most like ice’ (hit eal gemealt ise gelicost, line 1608) might relate to the famous scene in the Aeneid where the sword of Turnus, meeting the divine armour of

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27 See especially Orchard, ‘The Sources and Meaning of the Liber monstrorum’. It might be pointed out that among the Alexander-material employed by the author of the Liber monstrorum are the Latin texts that lie behind both the Wonders of the East and The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle.


29 The same term is used both of the sword that Weohstan takes from Eanmund (on which see Dane, ‘Wiglaf’s Sword’), which he is then given by Onela (line 2616a), and of the sword that Eofor uses to cleave through the ‘helmet made by giants’ worn by Ongentheow (line 2979b). See further, for example, Cronan, ‘The Rescuing Sword’; Culbert, ‘The Narrative function of Beowulf’s Swords’; Dane, ‘Wiglaf’s Sword’; Kaske, ‘Weohstan’s Sword’; Köberl, ‘The Magic Sword in Beowulf’; Nicholason, ‘Hunlafing and the Point of the Sword’.

30 Here, as elsewhere in the poem (for example, lines 198a, 1621a, 2140a, 2280a, and 3051b), the term eacen has the sense ‘increased (beyond normal measure)’. See Tolkien’s remarks in Clark Hall, trans., Beowulf, pp. x–xi.

31 For an alternative (and rather unconvincing) suggestion that the image derives from Celtic sources, see Puhvel, ‘The Melting of the Giant-Wrought Sword’.
Aeneas, ‘shattered at the blow like brittle ice’ (glacies ceu futtilis ictu / dissiluit, Aeneid XII.740–1). Although as it stands the parallel might not seem very secure, one need only imagine a variant text reading dissoluit (‘dissolves’) to provide a much better match. It must be said that extensive, cavalier, and ‘creative’ use of Vergil is something of a hallmark of the Liber monstrorum, whose author sometimes treats the text of the Aeneid with less than total respect. At any rate, simply as an indication of the high level of literary sophistication in the interleaving of Christian, secular, and heroic themes by an Anglo-Saxon writing around the earliest supposed date of composition of Beowulf, the Liber monstrorum probably deserves more attention from Beowulf-scholars than it has so far received.

Likewise, it may be instructive briefly to consider another Christian-Latin text, this time in verse and steeped in Vergilian influence, which shares with Beowulf a reassessment of Germanic heroic legend through Christian eyes. The probably ninth-century Waltharius has proved, like Beowulf, notoriously difficult to date with any precision, but it shares with the fragmentary Old English Waldere a concern to tell the story of the Germanic hero Walter of Aquitaine. The author, to judge by learned and witty allusions to Vergil, Prudentius, and a range of other Latin poets, was a well-read individual who was very comfortable with the conventions of Latin heroic verse. Yet some of the techniques the Waltharius-poet employs, namely formulaic repetition and the use of verbal echo, onomastic puns on character’s names, and the subversive use of language, have close parallels in Beowulf, and both poems seem steeped in the Germanic heroic ethos. The final scenes of the Waltharius, indeed, where Walther hides out in a mountainous cave with his treasure, and is besieged by thirteen warriors, of whom twelve fight and one refuses, read almost like a parody of Beowulf’s dragon-fight (including the detail that one of Walther’s

32 Klaeber, ‘Aeneis und Beowulf’, p. 348
33 Alas, no such variant is recorded by Mynors, ed., P. Vergili Maronis Opera, p. 416, nor anywhere else I have been able to find.
35 On the vexed question of the dating of Beowulf, see above, pp. 5–6.
36 Waltharius, ed. Strecker; cf. Kratz, ed. and trans., Waltharius and Ruodlieb; Smyser and Magoun, Survivals in Old Norwegian, pp. 111–45. On the question of the dating of the Waltharius, see, for example, Dronke, ‘Waltharius and the Vita Waltharii’; Schaller, ‘Ist der Waltharius frühkarolingisch?’. Neither of these scholars takes account of the close parallel between Waltharius, Prologus, line 15 (det pater ex summis caelum terramque gubernans) and Theodulf of Orléans, Carmen 71, line 91 (det pater altithronus caelum terramque gubernans) in their assessment of Carolingian literary connections with the text.
37 See further, for example, Dronke, ‘Functions of Classical Borrowing’, and the apparatus fontium in Strecker’s edition.
38 With regard to internal echoes in the Waltharius itself, one might compare, for example, lines 241 and 551; 466 and 470; 625 and 1323; 752 and 938; 937 and 1060. Internal echoes in the Waltharius can be traced using Stiene, ed., Konkordanz zum Waltharius-Epos. On similar patterns in Beowulf, see above, pp. 85–91.
40 Cf. Parkes, ‘Irony in Waltharius’. For similar use of double entendre and undercutting irony in Beowulf, see, for example, Shuman and Hutchings, ‘The Un-Prefix: a Means of Germanic Irony in Beowulf’.
assailants actually describes him as a ‘dragon’). This is not to suggest any direct connection, of course, simply to note that the *Beowulf*-poet was not the only Christian author to make use of Germanic legend in the service of Christian verse. Like the *Liber monstrorum*, then, the *Waltharius* seems to offer a potentially useful literary analogue to future generations of *Beowulf*-scholars.

But if the *Liber monstrorum* and the *Waltharius* demonstrate that in the early medieval period Christian poets and authors were well capable of making subtle literary use of their inherited pagan traditions, still closer connections can be established between *Beowulf* and a wide range of writings in both Latin and Old English, all of which ultimately lead back to the primary text of Christendom, namely the Bible, and it is to these texts that we now turn.

*Doing it by the book: biblical references in ‘Beowulf’*

It is striking to note that both of the biblical narratives explicitly alluded to in *Beowulf* should be connected to Grendel and his kin; as Malcolm Godden has remarked: ‘as Grendel is introduced by a reference to the Old Testament legend which describes the origin of monsters, so his end is announced by an allusion to the biblical myth of their destruction’. The first of the poet’s biblical allusions comes as part of a complicated sequence describing the fateful consequences of the building of Heorot (lines 86–114):43

41 *Waltharius*, line 790: *O versute dolis ac fraudis conscie serpens* (Strecker, ed., *Waltharius*, p. 56); cf. line 792 (*veluti coluber*).
43 In line 107a, the word *Caines* has been altered from *cames*; see further Pulsiano, ‘“Cames cynne”: Confusion or Craft?’. 
That Grendel should have been roused to wrath by Hrothgar’s poet singing a song of Creation seems only fitting, especially if, as has been suggested, lines 99–101 can be read both with what precedes (so alluding to Satan and the Fall) and with what follows (a simple reference to Grendel); certainly, similar strategies appear to be used elsewhere in Beowulf. Typically, the Beowulf-poet is able to encompass here in just a few lines both the spawning of the kin of Cain (ealle onwocon, line 111b) and their destruction by God (he him ðæs lean forgeald, line 114b).

Moreover, just as Cain and the Flood are invoked before Grendel’s depreda-
tions begin, so too the vengeance of Grendel’s mother is preceded by a parallel reference (lines 1258b–1267a):49

Grendles modor,  
ides, aglæcwif, yrmþe gemunde,  
se þe wæteregesan wunian scolde,  
cean streamas, sǐððan Cain wearð  
to ecgbanan angan breþer,  
faðerenmæge;  he þa fag gewat,  
morþre gemearcod, mandream fleon,  
westen warode.  Panon woc fela  
geosceaffgasta;  þæs þæra Grendel sum,  
heorowearh hetelic.

[Grendel’s mother, an awesome assailant in woman’s form, called to mind her misery, she who had to inhabit the dread waters, the cold streams, since Cain became the sword-slayer to his only brother, his paternal kinsman: for that he went forth stained [or ‘guilty’], marked by murder, fleeing the joys of men, dwelt in the wilderness. From there arose many fatal spirits; Grendel was one, a hateful and fierce outcast.]

Presumably, the Beowulf-poet is applying strict logic to the biblical tale: if the Flood was sent to destroy monstrous creatures, then the only ones who could survive were those who already inhabited watery depths.50

The final allusion to the biblical story of the Flood comes, fittingly enough, once Beowulf, who has despatched Grendel and his mother, brings back the hilt of the monstrous sword with which he had decapitated them both, and presents it to Hrothgar (lines 1687b–1693):

hylt sceawode,  
ealde lafe, on ðæm wæs or writen  
fyrngewinnes, sỹððan flod ofsloh,  
gifen geotende giganta cyn,  
frecne geferdon;  þæt wæs fremde þeod  
ecean Dryhtne;  him þæs endelean  
þurh wæteres wylm Waldend sealde.

[He gazed on the hilt, the ancient heirloom, on which had previously been inscribed the origin of ancient struggle, when the flood, the streaming ocean, slew the race of Giants (they suffered terribly [or ‘they dared boldly’]; that was a race hostile to the eternal Lord; to them the Ruler gave recompense through the surging of the water.]

That this inscribed weapon of the monstrous races should survive the Flood can be paralleled in patristic sources: Cassian, for example, tells how Noah’s wicked

49 The manuscript reads camp at line 1261a; on the widespread emendation to Cain at line 1261a, see, for example, Pulsiano, “‘Cames cynne’: Confusion or Craft?”

50 On post-diluvian survival of giants and monsters, see, for example, Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, pp. 78–84.
son, Cham, a latter-day Cain, inscribed on stone and metal his occult wisdom:

Quantum itaque traditiones ferunt, Cham filius Noe, qui superstitionibus istis et sacrilegis ac profanis erat artibus institutus, sciens nullum se posse super his memorialem librum in arcam prorsus infere, in qua erat una cum patre iusto ac sanctis fratribus ingressurus, scelestas artes ac profana commenta diversorum metallorum lamminis, quae scilicet aquaram conrumpi inundatione non passent, et durissimis lapidibus insculptabat. Quae peracto diluui eo in quae celauerat curiositate perquirens sacrilegiorum ac perpetuae nequitiae seminaria transmisit in posterum. 

[Various traditions tell that Cham, the son of Noah, who was instructed in those superstitions and sacrileges and profane arts, knowing that he could not bring a book detailing these things into the Ark, in which he was about to go with his righteous father and holy brothers, inscribed these wicked arts and profane commentaries on sheets of various metals and on the hardest rocks, which would not be harmed by the surge of waters. When the Flood was over he sought them out with the same curiosity for sacrilegious things with which he had hidden them, and transmitted the seeds of perpetual wickedness to later generations.]

However much one may quibble about precisely what is depicted on the hilt that Hrothgar gazes upon, the fact that the blade is said to have melted ‘most like ice’ in Grendel’s hot blood, is surely meant to recall the Flood (lines 1607b–1611):

\[
\text{Þæt wæs wundra sum,} \\
\text{Þæt hit eal gemealt ise gelicost,} \\
\text{ðonne forstes bend fæder onlæteð,} \\
\text{onwindeð wa³rapeas, se gewealh hafað} \\
\text{sæla ond mæla; þæt is soð metod.} \ 1610
\]

[It was a wonder that it entirely melted, most like ice, when the Father releases the bonds of frost, unwinds the water-fetters, he who has control over times and seasons: that is the true Creator.]

The double invocation of God, with a change of verb-tense to signify his continuing power, inevitably calls to mind God’s watery vengeance on the giants in the form of the Flood.

But if the three scenes depicting Cain and the Flood are the only ones in Beowulf where biblical allusion is unquestionable, it might be noted that further Old Testament references may underlie other aspects of the activities of the kin of Cain. So, for example, given the commonplace biblical injunctions against

51 On the conflation of roles between Cham and Cain, see, for example, Hamilton, ‘The Religious Principle in Beowulf’, p. 320, n. 4; Donahue, ‘Grendel and the Clanna Cain’, p. 168. For an overview, see Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, pp. 69–70.
52 Petschenig, ed., Johannes Cassiani Conlationes, Conlatio VIII.xxi.7–8, pp. 239/27–240/10; cf. Williams, Cain and Beowulf, p. 35.
54 Cf. the use of the Flood-motif in the Liber monstrorum above, pp. 133–7.
drinking blood,\textsuperscript{55} echoed in a range of Anglo-Saxon authors including Bede, Alfred, Ælfric, and Wulfstan,\textsuperscript{56} a Christian Anglo-Saxon audience would have found the description of Grendel’s eating-habits particularly loathsome (lines 739–45a):

\begin{quote}
Ne ðæt se aglæca yldan þohte,
ac he gefeng hraðe forman siðe
sleepende rinc, slat unwearnum,
bat banlocan, blod edrum dranc,
synsnædum swealh; sona hæfde
unlyfigendes eal gefeormod,
fet ond folma.\textsuperscript{740}
\end{quote}

[Nor did the awesome assailant think to delay, but he quickly seized at the first opportunity a sleeping warrior, tore him greedily, bit the joints, drank the blood from the veins, swallowed in sinful gulps \textsuperscript{[or ‘mighty gulps’]}; he had soon taken full care of the feet and hands of the unliving man.]

One might note that the reference to ‘feet and hands’ here may mask a further biblical reference: after all, even the dogs in the street who devour the corpse of the wicked Jezebel do not consume those extremities (II Reg. IX.35). Likewise, given the \textit{Beowulf}-poet’s explicit references to the Flood, it is important to point out both that after the Flood God prohibits the consumption of blood alongside flesh (Gen. IX.4) and that a range of commentators expressly connect such practices with those of the antediluvian giants; Bede is typical:\textsuperscript{57}

\begin{quote}
Ferunt autem quod in hoc maxima fuerit preuaricatio gigantum, quia cum sanguine carnem comederent; ideoque Dominus, illis diluuio extinctis, carne quidem uesci homines concesserit, sed ne id cum sanguine facerent prohibuerit.
\end{quote}

[They say what has been in this matter the greatest collusion of the giants, that they consumed flesh with blood; and so the Lord, once he had obliterated them in the Flood, permitted men to eat flesh, but forbade that they eat it with blood.]

Similar traditions about the blood-drinking habits of antediluvian giants are found in the apocryphal Book of Enoch, a text certainly known in Anglo-Saxon England, and one which, as Kaske has argued, may lie behind a number of elements in \textit{Beowulf} itself.\textsuperscript{58} The possible use by the \textit{Beowulf}-poet of apocryphal

\textsuperscript{55} See, for example, Lev. XVII.10–14 and XIX.26; Deut. XII.16 and 23, and XV.23.
\textsuperscript{56} See Robinson, ‘Lexicography and Literary Criticism’, pp. 102–3, who notes that these authors demonstrate ‘an almost obsessive concern with the Old Testament injunction against the drinking of blood’.
traditions may attest to a fuller engagement with scripture than has sometimes been supposed: if the range of biblical reference in *Beowulf* may not be wide, it may be deep.

**Biblical parallels and analogues**

The very nature of the way in which the *Beowulf*-poet alludes to biblical traditions without apparently having recourse to quotation from the biblical text itself is of some interest when one considers the ways in which other Old Testament tales appear to have echoes in the poem. There are, for example, a significant number of interesting parallels which, it has been suggested, seem to connect the story of *Beowulf* and Grendel with the biblical narrative of David and Goliath.\(^5^9\) The specific points of similarity might be schematised as in Table III, below. That there are no fewer than twelve such points of overlap is striking, to say the least; and the notion of the direct influence of the story of David and Goliath becomes still more attractive when it is noted that, according to Jerome’s explanation (which had wide currency in Anglo-Saxon England), the Hebrew name David means ‘strong in hand’ (*manu fortis*).\(^6^0\) Such parallels between *Beowulf* and David’s battle against Goliath need not imply any direct connection, however: some biblical scholars regard the tale of David and Goliath itself as a ‘folk epic’ of wide currency,\(^6^1\) and it is interesting to note that in at least one aspect the story of David and Goliath actually provides a closer parallel than *Beowulf* for a detail in Icelandic *Grettis saga*, generally considered the best Norse analogue for the battles with Grendel and his mother.\(^6^2\)

But if one need not imagine that *Beowulf* was composed pen in hand by an author carefully flicking through the biblical pages of I Samuel, the sheer number of parallels might suggest a general acquaintance with the story, perhaps heard rather than read. Certainly, it is instructive to turn to the story of David and Goliath as described in his homily on the Book of Kings by Ælfric, writing at a time roughly contemporary with that when the *Beowulf*-manuscript itself was written, many of the same essential narrative elements are found:\(^6^3\)

\[
\text{Þa forseah se ælmihtiga god þone Saul æt nextan and hine of his rice æwearp be his agenum gewyrhtum}
\]

\(^{59}\) The fullest analysis is by Horowitz, ‘Beowulf, Samson, David, and Christ’.

\(^{60}\) See further Thiel, *Grundlagen und Gestalt der Hebräischkenntnisse des frühen Mittelalters*, p. 286.

\(^{61}\) See especially Jason, ‘The Story of David and Goliath’.

\(^{62}\) On the links between *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga*, see Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 140–68; for an alternative view, see Fjalldal, *The Long Arm of Coincidence*. Whereas we do not learn what happens to the hilt of the monster-sword in *Beowulf* after it passes into the possession of Hrothgar (so prompting his so-called ‘sermon’, on which see below, pp. 155–62), David goes on to use Goliath’s sword to perform heroic deeds, just as Grettir uses the short-sword (*sax*), Kársnautr, gained under similar circumstances, throughout his heroic career; see further Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 145–6.

and gecæs him to cynincge þone cenan Dauid
seðe butan wæpnum gewylde ða leon
and þæs beran ceaflas tobræc mid his handum
and ahredde þæt gelæhte scep of his scearpum toðum.
He ofwearp eac syððan þone swyþlican
ent Goliam þone gramlican þe Godes naman hyrwde
and mid gebeote clypode bysmor Godes folce
gearu to anwige mid ornettre wæpnunge.
Hwæt þa Dauid eode togeanes þam ente
and ofwearp mid his liþeran þone geleafleasan ent
bufon ðam eagan þæt he beah to eorðan
Gelæhte þa of ðam ente his agen swurd
and his ormæte heafod mid þam of asloh
and hæfde ða gewunnen sige his leode.

[Then at last Almighty God rejected this Saul, and cast him out of his
kingdom according to his own deeds, and chose for Himself as king the
brave David, who without weapons had conquered the lion, and had torn
apart the bear’s jaws with his hands, and had delivered the captured
sheep from its sharp teeth. He also overthrew afterwards the mighty
giant, the cruel Goliath, who cursed God’s name, and boastfully cried
out against God’s people, ready for single combat with huge weaponry.
Listen! David went against that giant, and overthrew with his sling the
faithless giant above the eye, so that he fell to the ground. Then he took
from the giant his own sword, and struck off his huge head with it, and
so gained victory for his people.]

While many of the bare bones of the same basic outline as found in both
Beowulf and I Samuel are present here, several rather specific parallels are not:
if the Beowulf-poet was working from a general paradigm of the biblical story of
David and Goliath, then he clearly had access to one which was more detailed
than Ælfric supplied.64

In this context, it seems worth pursuing other possible parallels with Old
Testament heroes too.65 One link with the story of the Old Testament strongman
Samson has been detected in the episode in which Beowulf escapes alone by sea
from the scene of Hygelac’s death, apparently carrying thirty war-garments with
him (lines 2359–69):66

64 One might note in passing the explicit reference to David killing the bear with his hands, since a dif-
ferent etymologising of David’s name produces the sense ‘bear-hand’ (כָּבָד; I am grateful to
Samantha Zacher for pointing this out to me.

65 It is worth adding here that Bouman, ‘Beowulf’s Song of Sorrow’, suggests that the grief of the old
man described in Beowulf, lines 2444–62 has a parallel in the biblical story of David and Absalom in
II Samuel.

66 For the connection, see Horowitz, ‘Beowulf, Samson, David, and Christ’. The Beowulf-manuscript is
damaged at this point, and a number of the words have to be completed or supplied (so, for example,
stag in line 2362b has been filled out from manuscript . . . g, and porfton in line 2363b from manu-
script porf . . . ; the entire word eorla is lost at the corner of the page, and others conjecture ana
[‘alone’] instead). Also problematic is the vexed question as to whether Beowulf is swimming or
rowing at this point, about which there has been much debate. See, for example, Anderson,
‘Beowulf’s Retreat from Frisia’; Frank, ‘ “Mere” and “Sund”: Two Sea-Changes in Beowulf’; Green-
field, ‘A Touch of the Monstrous in the Hero’; Puhvel, ‘The Swim Prowess of Beowulf’; Robinson,
‘Beowulf’s Retreat from Frisia’; idem, ‘Elements of the Marvellous’; Wentersdorf, ‘Beowulf’s With-
drawal from Frisia’; idem, ‘Beowulf’s Adventure with Breca’.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Parallels</th>
<th>Beowulf</th>
<th>David</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1. King Hrothgar suffers the depredations of the giant Grendel</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em>, lines 115–93</td>
<td>King Saul suffers the depredations of the giant Goliath (I Samuel XVII.3 and 23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. King Hrothgar offers a rich reward for killing Grendel</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em>, lines 384–5 and 660b–661</td>
<td>King Saul offers a rich reward for killing Goliath (I Samuel XVII.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Beowulf appears from elsewhere, a promising youth</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em>, lines 247–51</td>
<td>David appears from elsewhere, a promising youth (I Samuel XVI.12 and XVII.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Early in his career, Beowulf had seemed of little worth</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em>, lines 2183b–2188a</td>
<td>Early in his career, David had seemed of little worth (I Samuel XVI.11 and XVII.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Beowulf’s credentials as a suitable combatant are challenged</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em>, lines 506–28</td>
<td>David’s credentials as a suitable combatant are challenged (I Samuel XVII.28 and 33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Beowulf lists his previous experience tackling similarly frightening creatures</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em>, lines 530–606</td>
<td>David lists his experience tackling similarly frightening creatures (I Samuel XVII.35–7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Beowulf is seen as heaven-sent, so his offer of help is accepted</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em>, lines 381b–384a</td>
<td>David is seen as heaven-sent, so his offer of help is accepted (I Samuel XVII.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Beowulf removes helmet, breastplate, and sword before the battle</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em>, lines 669–74</td>
<td>David removes helmet, breastplate, and sword before the battle (I Samuel XVII.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Beowulf boasts of victory, with God’s help</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em>, lines 677–87</td>
<td>David boasts of victory, with God’s help (I Samuel XVII.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Beowulf battles Grendel alone, and without a sword</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em>, lines 710–836</td>
<td>David battles Goliath alone, and without a sword (I Samuel XVII.39, 42, and 50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Beowulf decapitates Grendel with Grendel’s [mother’s?] sword</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em>, lines 1584b–1590</td>
<td>David decapitates Goliath with Goliath’s own sword (I Samuel XVII.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Beowulf returns with the sword and the head of Grendel</td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em>, lines 1612–17</td>
<td>David returns with the sword and the head of Goliath (I Samuel XVII.54)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thence Beowulf came, by his own strength, undertook a sea-journey; he had in his arms the war-gear of thirty men, when he put to sea. Not at all did the Hetware need to exult about their pitched battle, those who bore their shields against him; few came back from that battle-warrior returning home. Then the son of Ecgtheow crossed the sea’s expanse, a wretched lonely wanderer, back to his people.

The figure 30 is elsewhere associated with both Beowulf and Grendel: Grendel snatches thirty thanes from Heorot on his first visit (pritig þegna, line 123a; cf. fyftyne men ond oðer swylc, lines 1582b–1583a), and Beowulf has the strength of thirty men in his hand-grip (XXX.es manna mægencræft on his mundgripe, lines 379b–380). That Samson, who had already killed a lion with his bare hands (Iud. XIV.6), should travel to Ashkelon, kill thirty of their men, and return home with their garments as spoils (Iud. XIV.19), seems indeed to provide a broad parallel for this episode, in much the same way that some have seen echoes of the finding of Moses as a waterborne infant (whose burial-place no-one knows) in the story of Scyld Scefing, whose arrival and departure from Denmark are equally mysterious. Moses, who is described in the bible as ‘the gentlest man over all men’ (Num. XII.3: uir mitissimus super omnes homines), and in the Old English poem Exodus as ‘the mildest of men’ the last time he is described at all (line 550a: manna mildost) has also been associated with Beowulf himself, to whom similar qualities are attributed in the closing lines of the poem.

These apparent parallels between Beowulf and such a variety of figures from the Old Testament as David, Samson, and Moses, the first two of whom in Christian exegetical texts were often identified as types of Christ, surely encourages further speculation about other possible biblical analogues. Certainly, there seems a striking parallel to the fates of Grendel the persecutor...
of the Danes, beheaded and (literally) disarmed by Beowulf, and that of Nicanor, persecutor of the Jews, who meets a similar punishment at the hands of the hero Judas Maccabaeus. In effect, the same biblical tale is told twice, in both longer and shorter forms. The briefer report gives the essentials (I Macc. VIII.47).

Et acceperunt spolia eorum et praedam et caput Nicanoris amputaverunt et dexteram eius quam extenderat superbe et adtulerunt et suspenderunt contra Hierusalem.

[And they took the spoils of them for a booty, and they cut off Nicanor’s head, and his right hand, which he had proudly stretched out, and they brought it, and they hung it up over Jerusalem.]

The longer account, however, adds several details of particular interest for a comparison with Beowulf (II Macc. XV.30–5):

Praecepit autem Iudas qui per omnia corpore et animo emori pro civibus paratus erat caput Nicanoris et manum cum umero abscisam Hierosolymam perferri, quo cum convenisset convocatis contributibus et sacerdotibus ad altare arcersit et eos qui in arce erant. Et osteno capite Nicanoris et manu nefaria quam extendens contra domum sanctam omnipotentis Dei magnifice gloriatus est. Linguam etiam impii Nicanoris praecisam iussit particulatim avibus dari manum autem dementis contra templum suspendi. Omnes igitur caeli Dominum benedixerunt dicentes benedictus qui locum suum incontaminatum conservavit. Suspendit autem Nicanoris caput in summa arce evidens ut esset et manifestum signum auxilii Dei.

[And Judas, who was altogether ready in body and mind to die for his countrymen, commanded that Nicanor’s head, and his hand with the shoulder be cut off, and carried to Jerusalem. And when he had come thither, having called together his countrymen, and the priests to the altar, he sent also for them that were in the castle. And shewing them the head of Nicanor, and the wicked hand which he had stretched out, with proud boasts, against the holy house of the Almighty God, he commanded also, that the tongue of the wicked Nicanor, should be cut out and given by pieces to birds, and the hand of the furious man to be hanged up over against the temple. Then all blessed the Lord of heaven, saying: Blessed be he that hath kept his own place undefiled. And he hung up Nicanor’s head in the top of the castle, that it might be a clear and manifest sign of the help of God.]

The notion that Nicanor’s tongue was also cut off, along with his head and hand, seems to align the story with the ‘thought, word, and deed’ triad that has been observed in Beowulf; but more intriguing is the notion that both hand and arm of this ‘furious man’ (the connection with Grendel’s well-documented rage is

72 I am grateful to Rob Getz for pointing out to me this parallel.
73 Here and throughout I use Fischer et al., ed., Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem for the text of the Vulgate, and the Douai-Rheims translation (1582–1609), as revised by Richard Challoner (1749–50).
74 In view of the argument below, it should be pointed out that the reading manifestum signum is a variant; most texts (including the edition of the Vulgate by Fischer) prefer the reading manifestum sit.
75 See above, pp. 55 and 73. On the ‘thought, word, and deed’ triad, see Sims-Williams, ‘Thought, Word, and Deed: an Irish Triad’.
instructive)\textsuperscript{76} should be trophies for display, since the phrase ‘manifest sign’ (\textit{manifestum signum}) calls to mind the description of how Beowulf made a similarly ‘clear token’ of Grendel’s arm (lines 833b–836):\textsuperscript{77}

\begin{verbatim}
þæt wæs tacen sweotol,
syððan hildedeor hond alegde,
earn ond eaxle (þær wæs eal geador
Grendles grape) under geapne hrof.
\end{verbatim}

[That was a clear token, once the battle-brave one placed the hand, arm, and shoulder (Grendel’s grasp was all together) under the spacious roof.]

Another detail shared between this passage and the biblical account is the insistence that the trophy consists of the whole arm, from hand to shoulder; together, these two details might seem to support the notion of some connection between Beowulf and this heroic (indeed exemplary) biblical narrative.

By contrast with the poem’s apparent links with the Old Testament, there are strikingly few direct connections to New Testament language and thought.\textsuperscript{78} As Klaeber, perhaps the most persistent and persuasive of those who argue for substantial Christian influence on the text, rather wryly puts it: ‘The overall character of the Christian elements [in \textit{Beowulf}] is not particularly ecclesiastical or dogmatic.’\textsuperscript{79} Most of the attempts to imply direct reference to New Testament events seem somewhat strained, to say the least. Certainly, given the general dearth of references to female characters in the poem, it is striking that Hrothgar should focus on Beowulf’s (unnamed) mother in his praise of the hero after the latter has seen off Grendel (lines 942b–946a):

\begin{verbatim}
‘Hwæt, þæt secgan mæg
efne swa hwylc mægba swa ðone magan cende
æfter gumcynnum, gyf heo gyt lyfað,
þæt hyre ealdmetod este wære
bearngebyrd.’
\end{verbatim}

[‘Lo, she may say, whichever of womankind bore that boy of human race, if she still lives, that the Old Creator was kind to her in her child-bearing.’]

But to draw a parallel (as many do) with Luc. XI.27, in which an anonymous woman from the crowd praises Jesus by blessing the womb that bore him and the teats that gave him suck (\textit{quaedam mulier de turba dixit illi beatus venter qui te portavit et ubera quae suxisti}), seems rather strained.\textsuperscript{80} As C. L. Wrenn (who

\textsuperscript{76} See, for example, Orchard, \textit{Pride and Prodigies}, p. 32; Henry, ‘\textit{Furor heroicus}’; Pettitt, ‘The Mark of the Beast and the Balance of Frenzy’.

\textsuperscript{77} On this passage, see further, for example, Bremmer, ‘Grendel’s Arm and the Law’; Miller, ‘The Position of Grendel’s Arm in Heorot’. The related phrase \textit{sweotolan tacne}, again referring to Grendel’s attacks, occurs in \textit{Beowulf}, line 141b.

\textsuperscript{78} Cf. Cox, \textit{Crux of \textit{Beowulf}’}, pp. 12–32.


nonetheless recognises that the lines in *Beowulf* ‘may well be an echo’ of the biblical verse) rather donnishly puts it: ‘so natural and widespread a sentiment scarcely need have a definite “source”’.\textsuperscript{81} The very language and context of the *Beowulf*-passage, however, surely speaks against imbuing it with specifically (and exclusively) Christian significance, for although the lines in question are certainly amply highlighted by word play (with puns on *mæg* . . . *mæg*ba . . . *magan*, lines 942b–943; *cende* . . . *gumcyynnun*, lines 943b–44a; *bearngebyrdo*, line 946a),\textsuperscript{82} what is at issue is twofold: from Hrothgar’s perspective, reference to Beowulf’s mother leads naturally into his own intention to take Beowulf as an adopted son, which he does without pause (lines 946b–8a: *Nu ic, Beowulf, þec, / secg betsta, me for sunu wylle / freogan on ferhþe*); and from the poet’s perspective, emphasis on Beowulf’s mother (and his strictly human nature) paves the way for consideration of the fates and actions of three other mothers (Wealhtheow, Hildeburh, and Grendel’s mother), whose contrastingly sad stories soon unfold.\textsuperscript{83}

Likewise, the fact that Beowulf should be accompanied to his fight with the dragon by twelve retainers (of whom one is a thief),\textsuperscript{84} has seemed to some a sign of his Christ-like qualities, especially given Beowulf’s ‘expression of gloomy forebodings’ before the battle,\textsuperscript{85} which has been taken as echoing Christ’s agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. XXVI.36–46; Marc. XIV.32–42; cf. Luc. XXII.39–46).\textsuperscript{86} Other elements seem to link the two narratives,\textsuperscript{87} and it will be recalled that, just as Christ’s Passion took place at the ‘ninth hour’ (*hora nona*, Matt. XXVII.46; Marc. XV.34), so too as Beowulf decapitates the dead Grendel, blood rises to the surface of the monster-mere and the Danes lose heart at the same hour (*non*, line 1600a).\textsuperscript{88} Yet not everyone has been convinced. The number of companions who follow Beowulf to the dragon’s lair is, after all, part of a descending sequence: Beowulf is one of fifteen when he heads to Denmark (line 207b),\textsuperscript{89} and one of fourteen when he heads home (line 1641b), so perhaps it is not surprising that he should be one of thirteen in his last battle (line 2406b). As William Whallon, after a detailed analysis, puts it: ‘the numerological arguments fail to show Christ behind *Beowulf*, and yet they were the chief reason for thinking that the poem said more than it seemed to’.\textsuperscript{90} But if

\textsuperscript{81} Wrenn, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 133.

\textsuperscript{82} For other examples of wordplay in *Beowulf*, see above, pp. 73–6.

\textsuperscript{83} On the structural role of the women in *Beowulf*, see above, p. 84.

\textsuperscript{84} On the role of the thief in general, see Andersson, ‘The Thief in *Beowulf*’.

\textsuperscript{85} For the passage in question, see below, pp. 228–9.


\textsuperscript{87} The case is most forcefully put by Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 217: ‘the disloyalty of the ten cowardly followers of Beowulf, who flee for their lives, is not unlike the defection of the disciples of Christ, see [Marc. XIV.50 and Matt. XXVI.56]. (Also the injunction to the companions, [line] 2529 may recall [Marc. XIV.34 and Matt. XXVI.38].) Likewise, Wiglaf’s heroic assistance is matched by the ὁμοτεταχόν of Peter ([Matt. XXVI.51 and Joh. XVIII.10]).’ Cf. Klaeber, *The Christian Elements in ‘Beowulf’*, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{88} On the use of this and other terminology apparently derived from the Christian-Latin tradition in *Beowulf*, see Whitelock, *The Audience of ‘Beowulf’*, pp. 10–11.

\textsuperscript{89} The number matches that said to have been devoured by Grendel on his first visit (*fyftyne men*, line 1582b), although we are also told that he took away an equal number.

\textsuperscript{90} Whallon, *Formula, Character, and Context*, pp. 136–7.
the attempts to demonstrate that the life of Christ provided a model for the Beowulf-poet have not found universal acceptance,\(^91\) they have at least sparked off a search for parallels among the lives of those who certainly did model themselves after Christ, namely the saints.

### Saints alive: hagiographical analogues to ‘Beowulf’

Given that there are so few narratives surviving from Anglo-Saxon England that focus on the life of a single figure and can match Beowulf in scale,\(^92\) it is perhaps not surprising that critical attention has increasingly focused on those that can, namely Saints’ Lives;\(^93\) a number of parallels and analogues to episodes in Beowulf have been sought and identified among hagiographical material in a variety of languages,\(^94\) most recently and fully by Christine Rauer, who offers a detailed comparison between the dragon-episode in Beowulf and around sixty parallel episodes in a range of hagiographical sources dating from the fourth century to the sixteenth.\(^95\) One hagiographical passage in particular, from a ninth-century Life of Saint Samson of Dol (the so-called Vita II S. Samsonis), has been identified by Rauer as showing the greatest number of parallels with the dragon-fight in Beowulf; the relevant passage deserves quotation in full:\(^97\)

Quadam uero die cum esset in monasterio Pentali, rem famosam audiuit de quadam serpente prioribus acriore. Tum ille, sicut mos ei erat, misericordia motus iter direxit ad montem in quo serpens habitabat, et de monte circa se respiciens uidit fumum igne mixtum de loco serpentis ascendere. Et dixit suis: ‘Ecce locus serpentis.’ Et illi contracontences dixerunt: ‘Pater, non est consuetudo hominibus huc uenire. Et ille serpens nullum nocebit, eamus et dimittamus eum quia tu iam infirmaris.’ Et ille respondens infit: ‘Si ego infirmir, potens est Deus cuius anni nunquam deficient, et uirtus eius

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91 In general, see Lee, ‘Symbolism and Allegory’.
92 For a spirited attempt to connect Beowulf with one such secular narrative, see Chapman, ‘Beowulf and Apollonius of Tyre’.
93 An early attempt is that by Whitelock, The Audience of ‘Beowulf’, pp. 80–2, to connect Beowulf to the mid-eighth-century Vita S. Guthlacii of Felix of Croyland; apart from the general similarity of a hero battling fen-monsters in a barrow, Whitelock indicates two verbal parallels: the devilish monsters are styled ‘the seed of Cain’ (semen Cain [Colgrave, ed., Felix’s Life of St Guthlac, p. 106]), and the devil is called ‘the ancient enemy of the human race’ (antiquus hostis prolis humanae [Colgrave, ed., Felix’s Life of St Guthlac, p. 94]; cf. the terms ealdgewinna and feond mancynnes [mancynnes feond] used of Grendel in Beowulf, lines 164b, 1276a, and 1776a).
95 Rauer, Beowulf and the Dragon, where she also analyses around fifty dragon-fights from Scandinavian sources, and concludes that: ‘the hagiographical corpus would seem to lend itself more easily to a comparison with Beowulf than the corresponding Scandinavian material’ (p. 136).
96 The complete Life was edited by Plaine, ‘Vita antiqua Sancti Samsonis Dolensis episcopi’; see too Taylor, The Life of St Samson of Dol. For a full discussion of the background and significance of the Life, see Rauer, Beowulf and the Dragon, pp. 90–116.
One day, when [Saint Samson] was in the monastery of Pental, he heard a tale about a certain dragon fiercer than the previous ones. Then, impelled by compassion, as was his wont, he headed for the mountain that the dragon was inhabiting, and, looking around from the mountain, he saw smoke mixed with flame rising from the dragon’s place; and he said to his men: ‘There is the dragon’s place’. In great fear they said: ‘Father, it is not normal for men to come here. That dragon won’t harm anyone; let’s go and leave it alone, since you are already weak.’ He answered: ‘Though I am weak, God is strong, and His years never fail, and His power is with us. You stay here and wait for me until I come back to you.’ Then, taking the shield of faith, holding the sword of the Holy Spirit, and wearing the breastplate of hope, he went fearlessly to the dragon’s place and said to the dragon: ‘We must leave this place soon, so you had better not waste time coming out.’ Then, hearing his voice, the dragon came out, trembling with great reverence. Stretching out his hand, Saint Samson put his stole around its neck and dragged it beside him to the top of the mountain, where the brothers were expecting him to come. But when they saw the dragon coming with him, they became terrified, and wanted to run away. He said: ‘Did I not tell you sometime that he who fears God, does not need to fear any other creature? Fear God, and your soul will live, for nothing fails those who fear Him.’ In front of the disciples and many others, who came to see what would happen, Saint Samson said to the dragon: ‘In the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God most high, I order you to go into the sea, and live no more.’ Obeying his voice, it went and in the sight of them all, was killed in the sea. Then, praising God, they returned to the monastery.

The context of the episode, towards the end of the *Vita II S. Samsonis*, when Samson is an old man with a formidable reputation for getting rid of monsters, provides just one of a series of parallels with the dragon-fight in *Beowulf*; moreover, a number of the features of this passage are repeated in other dragon-episodes both in the *Vita II S. Samsonis* and in its eighth-century foreunner, the imaginatively titled *Vita I S. Samsonis*, and Rauer summarises
the narrative parallels between *Beowulf* and the whole sequence of dragon-episodes in these two early Lives of Saint Samson as follows:100

the appearance of a dragon which represents the greatest threat in a sequence of dangerous monsters, the devastation of the land by the dragon, the secluded mountain by the sea from which smoke and fire can be seen to rise, the communal journey to the cave, led by a guide, the role played by the hero’s companions (their attempt to dissuade the [hero] from approaching the dragon, their common procession to the dragon’s cave, their terrified response, the particular loyalty of one companion, their function as witnesses to the [hero]’s encouraging speech and the subsequent [encounter], their waiting on the mountain and varying degrees of fear and disloyalty), the concomitant moral preoccupations, the old age of the hero, the dragon’s sniffing, the summoning of the dragon from its cave and the sending of a messenger after the [encounter].

Such a list is certainly extremely impressive, and provides the most potent evidence to date for hagiographical influence on *Beowulf*. One clear difference between *Beowulf* and these texts, however, stands out: such encounters can scarcely be described as ‘dragon-fights’, since only rarely does any fighting occur; for dragon-slaying heroes, one must look elsewhere.101

**Redeeming lost souls: patristic and homiletic influence on ‘Beowulf’**

Given the extent to which the written culture of the Anglo-Saxons demonstrably depended on a sweeping range of patristic authors, it is perhaps unsurprising that the influence of several of those authors (notably Gregory and Augustine, who were among the most influential) should have been sought on *Beowulf*.102 Margaret Goldsmith’s is perhaps the most sustained attempt to date to attribute a raft of motifs, themes, and phrases to the direct effect of Latin patristic and homiletic sources, but it is important to recognise that for a majority of Anglo-Saxons, such influence would have been mediated through the vernac-

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100 Ibid., pp. 112–13.
101 For example, to the Norse figures of Thor or Sigurðr, on whom see above, pp. 105–10 and 119–23. One might note in passing a curious resemblance to *Beowulf*’s dragon-fight in Laȝamon’s *Brut*, lines 3206–52; as McNelis, ‘Laȝamon as Auctor’, p. 254, n. 3, points out: ‘Morpidus’ monster-fight is oddly similar to that in *Beowulf*; in both fights, the king’s anger is provoked by wholesale attack against the common people, particularly in lands near the sea, at which the king feels grief in his heart... *Beowulf* orders his retainers to await the result on a *beorge*; Morpidus orders his to wait in a *burȝe*. In both, the king seeks the monster out in his lair; he breaks his sword on the monster; he is killed by a bite rather than flame; he is criticised for exhibiting pointless courage in confronting such a monster single-handed; and the people are ambivalent in lamenting the king’s loss while rejoicing in the monster’s demise. These details do not correspond to [Laȝamon’s main sources; these details are not found in] Geoffrey, in which the monster promptly swallows Morvid whole, or in Wace, where a brief fight is followed by a description of the dragon’s slow death.’

102 Tom Hill has consistently argued for such patristic influence on a range of Old English poems; see, for example, ‘Two Notes on Patristic Allusion in *Andreas*’; *idem*, *Hwyrftum scriþað: Beowulf*, line 163’; *idem*, ‘The Return of the Broken Butterfly’; *idem*, ‘The Christian Language and Theme of *Beowulf*’. Cf. Greenfield, ‘Old English Words and Patristic Exegesis’.
The apparent influence of vernacular homiletic sources is evident early on in \textit{Beowulf}, when the \textit{Beowulf}-poet chastises the Danes for sacrificing to heathen deities in an attempt to escape the depredations of Grendel (lines 175–88):\footnote{Goldsmith, \textit{The Mode and Meaning of ‘Beowulf’}, passim.}

\begin{verbatim}
Hwilum hie geheton æt hærgtrafum 175
wigweorþunga, wordum bædon
þæt him gastbona geoce gefremede
wið þæodþreaum. Swycle was þeaw hyra,
haþenra hyht; helle gemundon
in modsefan, metod hie ne cuþon,
daeda demend, ne wiston hie drihten god,
ne hie huru heofena helm herian ne cuþon,
wuldres waldend. Wa bið þæm ðe sceal
þurh sliðne nið sawle bescufan
in fyres fæþm, frofre ne wenan,
wihte gewendan; wel bið þæm þe mot
æfter deaðdaege drihten secean
ond to fæder fæþmum freoðo wilnian.
\end{verbatim}

[At times they vowed at heathen temples homage to idols, asked in words that the spirit-slayer grant them succour against their dire distress. Such was their custom, the hope of heathens: they recalled hell in their hearts. They did not know the Creator, the Judge of Deeds, nor did they recognise the Lord God, nor truly did they know how to praise the Protector of the Heavens, the Ruler of Glory. It shall be woe for the one who must through cruel emnity thrust his soul into the fire’s embrace, not hope for comfort, or any change; it shall be well for the one who may seek the Lord after his death-day, and ask for protection in the father’s embrace.]

The damning phrase ‘hope of heathens’ (\textit{hæþenra hyht}, line 179a) says it all; in Christian eyes, heathens have no hope: ‘to be a heathen is sin enough’.\footnote{Stanley, ‘\textit{Hæthenra Hyht in Beowulf}’, p. 150.} But, as we have seen, the \textit{Beowulf}-poet often seems to sanctify his heathen references,\footnote{See above, pp. 118–19.} and this, the most explicit reference to heathen practice in the entire poem, is no exception: the fervent variation on titles for God (there are five such in the three lines 180b–3a) is presumably intended to have an apotropaic effect.\footnote{Cf. Payne, ‘The Danes’ Prayers to the “gastbona” in \textit{Beowulf}’.} The stark choice between Christianity and paganism is spelt out as that between ‘the fire’s embrace’ (\textit{fyres fæþm}, line 185a) and ‘the father’s embrace’ (\textit{fæder fæþmum}, line 188a); for some it shall be ‘well’ (\textit{wel}, line 186b), for others ‘woe’ (\textit{wa}, line 183b). Such parallel structures (and there are others, such as the pattern \textit{ne cuþon . . . ne wiston . . . ne cuþon} in lines 180b–2b)\footnote{See further below, pp. 238–9.} and other ornamental devices (such as the soundplay on \textit{sliðne nið}, line 184a) clearly...
mark this passage out as a set-piece, but the content of these lines has proved
difficult for some to swallow; as Tolkien put it: ‘unless my ear and judgment are
wholly at fault, they have a ring and measure unlike their context, and indeed
unlike that of the poem as a whole’. Tolkien’s ‘ear and judgment’ are justly
celebrated, and it is perhaps no surprise that this brief passage contains two
half-lines that Bliss was unable to make comply with his complicated metrical
system. That the two half-lines in question clearly have the same structure
(Wa bið þæm ðe sceal, line 183b, and wel bið þæm þe mot, line 186b) which Hal
Momma detects in no fewer than eighteen other cases in the extant Old English
poetic corpus, might suggest that the problem lies with Bliss’s system, were it
not also for the fact that the same structure is quite widely attested in Old
English homiletic prose, and may ultimately derive from the Beatitudes. Once again, the Beowulf-poet seems to be sanctifying his pagan content through
Christian language.

At the other end of the poem, a similarly homiletic tone has been detected in
the report of the curse on the dragon’s treasure, which Ted Irving has described
as ‘curious in that it describes a pagan curse in unmistakably Christian
language’. The passage is again one of the most controversial in the whole
poem (since it has a direct bearing on whether or nor Beowulf himself is
damned), and reads as follows (lines 3062b–75):

Wundur hwar þonne
eorl ellenrof ende gefere
lifgesceafa, þonne leng ne mæg
mon mid his magum meduseld buan.
Swa wæs Biowulfe, þa he biorges weard
sohte searoniðas; seolfa ne cuðe
þurh hwæt his worulde gedal weorðan sceolde.
Swa hit oð domes dæg diope benemdon
þeodnas mære, þa ðæt þær dydon,
þæt se secg wære synnum scildig,
hergum geheaðerod, hellbendum fæst,
owmmum gewitnad, se ðone wong strude,
naefne he goldhwæte gearwor hæfde
agendes est ær gesceawod.
It is a wonder where a brave-hearted warrior will come to the end of his life’s affairs, when he no longer may, a man among his kinsmen, dwell in the mead-hall. So it was for Beowulf, when he sought out the mound’s guardian, cunning hostilities; he himself did not know how his parting from the world should come about. So the famous princes who put [the treasure] there gravely declared that until doomsday the man who plundered that place should be guilty of crimes, closed up in heathen temples, secure in the bonds of hell, punished with misfortunes, unless he had previously more readily perceived the gold-bestowing favour of the Lord.

The passage moves from a general comment about the essential unknowability of death, to a specific comment about Beowulf’s own ignorance concerning his own demise; it then continues with an apparently explicit connection between Beowulf’s own case and the curse on the one who plunders the dragon’s hoard (swa . . . swa, lines 3066a and 3069a). The curse itself, with its parallel syntactical structures (synnum scildig, / hergum geheaðerod, hellbendum fæst, / wommum gewitinad, lines 3071b–3073a) and evident references to ‘doomsday’, ‘heathen temples’, and ‘hell-bonds’ (domes dæg, line 3069a; hergum, line 3072a; hellbendum, line 3072b), is clearly a set-piece, and certainly seems to owe much to the Christian language of anathema and condemnation. But it is important to note that the first time that the curse is mentioned (almost immediately before the quoted passage) there is an escape-clause provided (lines 3051–7):

Þonne wæs þæt yrfe, eacencræftig, iumonna gold galdre bewunden, þæt ðam hringsele hrinan ne moste gumena ænig, nefne god sylfa, sigora soðcyning, sealde þam ðe he wolde he is manna gehyld hord openian, efne swa hwylcum manna swa him gemet ðuhte.

[Then that legacy, increased in power, the gold of ancient men, was enveloped in a spell, so that no man could be permitted to touch that ring-chamber, unless God himself, the true king of victories (he is man’s protection) granted that he would open the hoard to whomsoever of men as seemed fitting to him.]

Elsewhere in the poem, the conjunction nefne (‘unless’, ‘except that’) is used, as here, to stress the difference between God’s power and man’s (nefne him witig god, line 1056a; nemne . . . halig god, lines 1052a and 1053b). Such parallels surely encourage the acceptance of the proposed emendation nefne he for manuscript næs he at line 3074a, with the important corollary that although the

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116 One might compare the poet’s repeated insistence on the ignorance of the Danes in the passage previously cited, at lines 180b–2b; see further below, pp. 238–9.
117 Cf. Doig, ‘Beowulf 3096b: Curse or Consequence?’.
118 Cf., for example, the same tone in Ælfric, Catholic Homilies II.v.131–3 (Godden, ed., Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies, pp. 45–6): Scyldig he wes to hellicere susle for his mandaedum. ac he geandette his synna drihtne sylfum (emphasis added).
escape-clause may apply to Beowulf; it need not: the final decision is left in God’s hands. Indeed, the only person to whom God’s protection in rifling the dragon’s hoard has been apparently granted is the thief, of whom the poet rather curiously says ‘so may an undoomed man easily endure hardship and exile, who maintains the Lord’s favour’ (swa mæg unfaege eaðe gedigan / wean ond wrecsið, se de Wealdendes / hyldo gehealdeþ, lines 2291–2293a). If this quasi-gnomic statement is the poet’s own equivalent of Beowulf’s own motto, uttered many lines before, that ‘fate often spares an undoomed man, if his courage endures’ (wyrd oft nered / unfaege eorl, þonne his ellen deah, lines 572b–573), it is important to stress the difference between the two perspectives, one of which is explicitly Christian and the other not, just as the poet’s insistence in the passage under scrutiny that Beowulf ‘sought out... cunning hostilities’ (sohte searoniðas, line 3067a) seems flatly to contradict Beowulf’s own earlier proud boast that he ‘did not seek out cunning hostilities’ (ne sohte searoniðas, line 2738a). Nor is the poet the only one implicitly to undermine Beowulf’s actions and assertions; in the passage immediately following the second expression of the curse, even Wiglaf seems to criticise his dead lord.

Elsewhere in the poem, homiletic language seems mainly concentrated in just three passages, namely the two descriptions of the monster-mere (lines 1357–79 and 1408–17) and in Hrothgar’s so-called ‘sermon’ (lines 1700–84). It is interesting to note that two of these three passages should be put in the mouth of the pagan King Hrothgar, but here again the poet is at least demonstrating some consistency in the voices he gives his characters. Hrothgar at any rate gives the first and longest of the descriptions of the monster-mere, speaking to Beowulf about the kin of Cain and their abode just before the latter heads off to confront Grendel’s mother (lines 1357b–1379):

‘Hie dygel lond
warigeað, wulfhleoþu, windige næssas,
frecne fengelad, þær fyrgenstream
under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð,
flod under foldan. Niþ þæt feor heonon
migemearces þæt se mere standeð;
ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas,
wudu wyrtum fæst wæter oferhelmað.
þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon
fyr on flode. No þæs frod leofað
gumena bearna,  þæt þone grund wite.
Deah þe heðestapa hundum geswenced,
heorot hornum trum, holtwudu sece,

119 See further below, pp. 238–62.
120 Note the soundplay in Wealdendes / hyldo gehealdeþ, lines 2292–3a, on which see above, pp. 61–9.
122 See below, pp. 261–3.
123 On the sermon itself, see, for example, Hansen, ‘Hrothgar’s “Sermon” in Beowulf as Parental Wisdom’; Ohba, ‘Hrothgar’s “Sermon” and Beowulf’s Death’.
124 On which see further below, pp. 203–22.
125 For the emendation helan in line 1372a, see above, pp. 47–8.
feorran geflymed, ðær he feorh seleð, 1370
aldor on ofre, ðær he in wille
hafelan helan. Nis þæt heoru stow.
þonon yðgeblond up astigeð 1375
won to wolcnum, þonne wind styreþ,
lad gewidru, ðøpæt lyft drysmæþ,
roderas reotað. Nu is se ræd gelang
eft æt þe anum. Eard git ne const,
frecne stowe, ðær þu findan miht
sinnigne secg; sec gif þu dyrre.’

[‘They dwell in a secret land, wolf-slopes, windy headlands, dangerous
fen-tracts, where the mountain-stream goes down under the headlands’
mists, the flood under the ground. It is not far from here in the tally of
miles, where that mere stands, over which hang frosty groves, a wood
firm-rooted overshadows the water. There one can see each night a
dreadful wonder, fire on the flood. No one lives so wise of the sons of
men that knows the bottom. Even though the heath-stepper, driven by
the hounds, a hart, strong in its horns, may seek the wooded forest,
chasied from afar, he will give up his life, his spirit on the brink, rather
than plunge in to save his head; that is no pleasant place. From there the
tumult of the waves rise up dark to the clouds, when the wind stirs up
hateful storms, until the sky turns grim, the heavens weep. Now once
again is a solution to be sought from you alone. You do not yet know the
dwelling-place, the dangerous spot where you can find the sinful crea-
ture. Seek if you dare.’]

The geography of the place, which Stanley has rightly described as ‘a
gallimauphry of devices’,126 is exceedingly hard to reconcile, and a number of
critics have remarked on the difficulty in particular of determining whether an
inshore lake or a sea-side location is intended.127 The ‘wulf-slopes’ (wulfleóþu,
line 1358a) would seem to accord well with the later descriptions of Grendel’s
mother as a ‘sea-wolf’ (brimwylf, lines 1506a and 1599a), while both Grendel
and his mother are described by terms which would link them with the wolvish
wearh (Norse vargr, ‘were-wolf’), namely heorowearh (line 1267a) and
grundwyrgen (line 1518b).128 The image of the ‘hart strong in horns’ (heorot
hornum trum, line 1369a), which commences with two lines alliterating on h,
cannot help but conjure images of the imperilled Danish hall, Heorot, with its
wide gables (horngeap, line 82a; hornreced, line 704a). Up to this point, the
poet, speaking in propría persona has described Grendel as a ‘fiend in hell’
(feond on helæ, line 101b),129 a ‘captive of hell’ (helle hæfton, line 788a), and a
‘hellish spirit’ (helle gast, line 1274a); he has described him as ‘heathen’
(hæfen, lines 852b and 986a), ‘enemy of mankind’ (feond mæcynnes, lines

127 See, for example, Butts, ‘The Analogical Mere’; Lawrence, ‘The Haunted Mere’; Mackie, ‘The
Demon’s Home in Beowulf’; Schrader, ‘Sacred Groves, Marvelous Waters’.
128 It is interesting to note that Beowulf appears to say of Unferth that he will experience werhōo in Hel
for killing his brothers (lines 588b–99a), since it is precisely that fratricide which aligns him with
the kin of Cain; on textual difficulties with this passage, however, see below, pp. 252–3.
129 Cf. Cosijn, Notes on Beowulf, p. 3, speaking against those who would emend to healle (‘hall’).
164b and 1276a), and ‘God’s opponent’ (Godes andsaca, lines 786b and 1682b), saying of Grendel, when held in Beowulf’s grip, that ‘he wished to flee into darkness, to seek the company of devils’ (wolde on heolstor fleon, / secan deofla gedræg, lines 755b–756a). Of Grendel’s final descent into the mere, the poet simply says: ‘joyless in the fen-refuge, he laid aside his life, his heathen soul: there hell received him’ (dreama leas / in fenfreoðo feorh alegde, / hefene sawle; þær him hel onfeng, lines 850b–852). None of the characters in the poem have up to this point used comparable language, and afterwards only Hrothgar fleetingly seems unwittingly to apply a vernacular version of the Christian-Latin term ‘old enemy’ (hostis antiquus) to Grendel, whom he calls his ‘ancient foe’ (ealdgewinna, line 1776b); and surely after twelve years of depredations Hrothgar has the right to do that. But the consistency of tone and perspective is perfect throughout.

Shortly following Hrothgar’s chilling description, the poet gives his own potted version of the trip to the monster-mere (lines 1408–17): Ofereode þa æþelinga bearn

steap stanhlīðo, stige nearwe,
enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad,
neowle næssas, nicorhusa fela.
He feara sum beforan gengde
wisra monna wong sceawian,
opðet he færinga fyrgenbeamas
ober harne stan  hleoðian funde,
wynleasne wudu; wæter under stod
dreorig ond gedrefed.

[Then the sons of princes passed over steep, rocky, slopes, thin courses, narrow single tracks, unknown paths, precipitous crags, many dwellings of water-monsters; [Beowulf] went on ahead with a few wise companions to view the place: until suddenly he perceived mountainous trees towering over the grey rock, a joyless wood; water stood below, grim and troubled.]

The two passages together produce an odd combination of images: of trees, and cliffs, and water; of hot and cold; and of curious creatures seething in the depths. Long ago, Richard Morris pointed out the close parallel to this description in that given by Saint Paul of Hell, according to Blickling Homily XVI: Swa sanctus paulus wæs geseonde on norðanweardne þisne middangeard þær ealle wætero niðergewitad ʒ he þær geseah ofer ðæm wætere sumne hårne

130 Cf. Malone, ‘Grendel and His Abode’, pp. 298–9; Maynard ‘“Secan deofla gedræg”’. See too the later description of Grendel and his mother as ‘devils’ (deofla, line 1680a).
133 Cf. Cook, ‘Old English Notes: Beowulf 1408ff’.
So Saint Paul was looking at the northern part of this world, where all the waters go down, and he saw there above the water a certain grey rock, and there had grown north of that rock very frosty woods, and there were dark mists, and under that rock was a dwelling-place of water-monsters and wolves; and he saw that on that cliff there hung in those icy woods many black souls, tied by their hands, and their foes, in the guise of water-monsters, were gripping them like greedy wolves, and the water was black underneath that rock, and between that cliff and the water was a drop of twelve miles, and when the branches broke, the souls who hung on those branches went down, and the sea-monsters snatched them.

Subsequent analyses have argued both vigorously and variously: for the direct influence of Beowulf on Blickling Homily XVI; for the reverse; that both authors were independently drawing on a vernacular version of the apocryphal Visio S. Pauli; or that both drew on shared homiletic motifs encountered either through reading or listening. The further parallels that apparently link both these passages to sections of The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle need also to be taken into account, however: the introduction of a third putatively connected text certainly complicates things. It is important to note, however, that, as with motifs apparently borrowed from pagan myth, in introducing motifs of a description of hell ultimately endebted to the Visio S. Pauli, the Beowulf-poet has naturalised them in their new setting; as Charlie Wright puts it: ‘while retaining the essential configuration, he divests particular elements of their explicitly eschatological reference by literalising them: his “hell” is still in the north, because that is where the Danes live; his frosty trees, bereft of the souls that once were suspended from their branches, are left to “hang” over the water below; and his water-monsters have been exorcised of their demons’.

Much more explicitly homiletic is the ‘sermon’ on the dangers of pride that Hrothgar issues to Beowulf immediately after the latter has emerged victorious from the monster-mere (lines 1700–84). Once again, however, such use of Christian language is far from random, and seems intimately connected with the
fact that the speech is inspired by Hrothgar gazing on the hilt from the
monster-mere, which is inscribed with the story of the biblical Flood.¹⁴³ Like-
wise, it is apparent that not all of the speech contains homiletic imagery:
Klaeber describes it as ‘conspicuous for the blending of heroic and theological
motives’,¹⁴⁴ and most of the Christian diction is restricted to just one (albeit the
longest) section of the four into which the speech naturally falls.¹⁴⁵ Hrothgar
briefly congratulates Beowulf (lines 1700–9a), before offering him a warning in
the shape of the legendary Heremod (lines 1709b–1724a),¹⁴⁶ contemplation of
whose fate leads Hrothgar into general musings on mankind’s lot (lines
1724b–1768), after which he closes with a brief section on himself (lines
1769–84). It is the third of these sections that is of interest here (lines
1724b–1768):¹⁴⁷

‘Wundor is to secganne
hu mihtig god manna cynne
þurh sidne sefan snytrru bryttað,
eard ond eorlscipe; he ah ealra geweald.
Hwilum he on lufan lætæð hworfan
monnes modgeþone væran cynnes,
seleð him on eþle eorþan wynne
to healdanne hleoburh wera,
gedeð him swa gewealdendæ worolde dælas,
side rice, þæt he his selfa ne maeg
his unsnytrrum ende gehþencean.
Wunað he on wiste; no hine wiht dweleð
adl ne yldo, he him inwitsorn
on sefan sweorceð, ne gesacu ohwær
eghete eoweð, ac him eal worold
wendeð on willan; he þæt wyrse ne con –
oð þæt him on innan oferlygda dæl
weaxeð ond wridað. þonne se weard swefeð
þonne bið he hræþpre under helm drepen
þinne bið on hreþpre – him bebeorgan ne con –
biteran stræle – him wundorbeodum wergan gastes;
þinceð him to lytel þæt he lange heold,

¹⁴³ Part of the relevant passage is cited above, pp. 110–11. The introduction to the speech (lines
1687–99) is the longest such in the whole poem (see Table IV below, pp. 206–7), and the connection
between what Hrothgar says and what he sees (namely the hilt) is made apparent both by the fact
that the poet uses rhyme to emphasise that ‘Hrothgar spoke, gazed on the hilt’ (Hroðgar maðelode, hylt
sceawode, line 1687), and that almost the whole of the rest of the introduction is taken up with a
description of what was inscribed on the hilt; at lines 1698b–99 we are reminded that ‘Then the wise
one spoke, the son of Healfdene, everyone was silent’ (Da se wisa spræc / sunu Healfđenes
swigedon ealle).


¹⁴⁵ For arguments about the basic structure of the speech, see, for example, Cox, Cruces, p. 132;

¹⁴⁶ On this section, see above, pp. 110–11.

¹⁴⁷ The manuscript reads fædde at line 1750a, but the emendation adopted here is commonly accepted.
It is striking that just as Hrothgar concluded his warning about Heremod with a direct appeal to Beowulf; the list of dangers that face a man at the height of his
powers (lines 1735–9a) are echoed in a still longer list of the potential pitfalls facing Beowulf himself (lines 1762b–1769). The style of the whole ‘sermon’ at this point is highly homiletic: within the space of only twenty-three lines we find three examples of an alliterating pair of finite verbs (weaxað ond wridað, line 1741a; forgyteð ond forgymeð, line 1751a; forsiteð ond forsworceð, line 1767a) of a kind uncommon elsewhere in Beowulf, but frequently found in vernacular prose homilies, where very similar themes also occur.148 So, for example, the motif of the arrows of the devil aimed at men’s souls is explored in precisely the same context of overweening pride in Vercelli Homily IV:149

Þonne hæfð þæt dioful geworht bogan þæt stræla. Se boga bið geworht of ofermettum, þæt stræla bioð swa manigra cynna swa swa mannes synna bioð . . . Ælce dæge hæbbæð [we] twegen hyrdas: oðer cymð ðefan of heofonum, þe us sceall gode bysene onstellan þæt us gode þeawas tæcan, þæt hæfð him on handa þa sceðlas þe ic ær nemde þæt sweord, þæt wylle us forstandan æt þam awyrgden diofele, þæt þære stylenan helle cymð mid his scearpum strælum us mid to scotianne.

[Then the devil has made a bow and arrows. The bow is made of pride, and the arrows are of as many kinds as man’s sins . . . Each day we have two guardians, and one comes from the heavens above, who is to establish a good example for us and teach us good virtues, and he has in his hand the shields which I mentioned earlier, and the sword, and he wants to defend us against the accursed devil, who comes from steely hell with his sharp arrows, with which to shoot us.]

The ultimate sources for such imagery are biblical, from both the Old and New Testaments. Most famous is that from Ephesians VI.13–17, which speaks of ‘the flaming arrows of the evil one’ (tela nequissimi ignea, Ephesians VI.13), but equally pertinent here is Psalm XC.4–6; both passages, alongside Prudentius’s Psychomachia, which was widely read in Anglo-Saxon England,150 popularised the use of the theme of spiritual warfare in Anglo-Saxon literature.151 With specific regard to the passage from Ephesians, it may well be that the Beowulf-poet is here intentionally playing on the two senses of the term fyren (fyrenum, line 1744b), which means both ‘crime’ or ‘sin’ and ‘fiery’, in order to allude to the ‘flaming arrows’ of his ultimate source.152 Likewise, this section of Hrothgar’s sermon concludes with a familiar homiletic device: using a series of alliterative pairs linked by polysyndetic oððe (lines 1763–6); several examples might be cited which (as here) specifically focus on alternative ways to die.153

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148 Clemoes, ‘Style as a Criterion’, pp. 180–1, lists only seven other examples of synonymous or near-synonymous pairings of finite verbs in the whole of the rest of Beowulf; cf. Klaeber, ed., Beowulf, p. 192.


150 See further, for example, Orchard, The Poetic Art of Aldhelm, pp. 170–8.

151 In general, see Hermann, Allegories of War.

152 Cf. Robinson, ‘A Sub-Sense of Old English fyrm(-)’.

153 A convenient set of examples is provide by Lapidge, ‘The Archetype of Beowulf’, pp. 38–9, to which might be added Bazire and Cross, ed., Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies, III.81–6 (pp. 50–1) and V.43–9 (p. 71).
Hrothgar concludes his sermon with an account of how his own past happiness and martial glory suffered a rebuff in the form of Grendel (lines 1769–81):154

’Swa ic Hringdena hund missera weold under wolcnum ond hig wigge beleac manigum mægþa geond þysne middangeard, æscum ond ecgum, þæt ic me ænigne under swegles begong gesacan ne tealde. Hwæt, me þæs on eþle edwenden cwom, gyrn æfter gomene, seoþðan Grendel wearð, ealdgewinna, ingenga min; ic þære socne singales wæg modceare micle. Þæs sig metode þanc, ecean dryhtne, þæs ðe ic on aldre gebad þet ic on þone hafelan heorodreorigne ofer ealdgewin eagem starige.’

[‘So, under the skies, I ruled the Ring-Danes for fifty years, and protected them in battle against many nations throughout this world, with spears and swords, so that I did not reckon anyone an enemy to me under the expanse of the sky. Yet in my homeland a reversal occurred, grief after joy, once Grendel, the ancient adversary, became my invader; I continually bore that persecution, great sorrow of heart. Thanks be to the Creator, to the eternal Lord, that I should experience during my lifetime that I might stare with my eyes on that blood-stained head after the ancient struggle.’]

Hrothgar’s tragedy is that, after success abroad, he suffers reversal at home after a fifty-year reign; it is in this context that he uses an apparently Christian turn of phrase, describing Grendel as his ‘ancient adversary’ (ealdgewinna, line 1776a).155 The cogency of Hrothgar’s warning is underlined by the poet’s repetition of precisely the same pattern in the cases of Grendel’s mother, attacked at home after her successful raid of Heorot at the end of her fifty-year reign (lines 1497–8), and, later, Beowulf himself, who reigns for fifty years after his successes abroad, but is attacked at home by the dragon (lines 2208b–2211).156 If Hrothgar is ostensibly here preaching to Beowulf on the dangers of pride, then the Beowulf-poet is implicitly preaching to us all.157

154 The manuscript reads ed wendan at line 1774b.
155 See above, p. 157.
156 See above, p. 64.
157 It is important to note that Hrothgar’s sermon is not the only such in verse on the theme of pride to survive in Old English: Vainglory (ed. and trans. Shippey, Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English, pp. 54–7) provides a number of excellent parallels of thought and language to what Hrothgar says here.
Distant echoes of faraway voices: parallels with other Old English poems

The twin notions that the Beowulf-poet may have used existing Old English Christian verse as a source, or that Beowulf may have been sufficiently well known for other poets to echo it, were both swept aside in the wake of the oral-formulaic debate that dominated much of twentieth-century discussion of the poem:158 the whole idea of direct borrowing between poems (and between poets) was subsumed in the supposition that Old English poets instead drew on a stock of shared diction, and that any perceived overlap between poems simply reflected the partial and incomplete nature of the extant corpus.159 Such arguments ignored the fact that surviving Anglo-Latin poetry from the seventh century to the eleventh was demonstrably formulaic, and itself drew on the one hand on a stock of traditional formulas inherited from the Classical and Christian Latin poetic past, as well as on direct borrowings from other Anglo-Latin (and other) poets.160 Moreover, modern computistical methods allow the quick and direct comparison of shared phrasing within the entire extant corpus of Old English at speeds unimagined by those late nineteenth-century scholars who laboriously compiled lists of Parallelstellen in order to demonstrate both the interdependence and comparative chronology of the whole range of Old English poems.161 It seems likely that the identification and classification of formulaic language unique to individual texts and groups of texts will occupy scholars for a while to come, after which a serious and informed debate about the relationship between surviving Old English poems can be held.162

So, for example, striking parallels of diction have been identified between Beowulf and the Old English poem Andreas, preserved in the Vercelli Book, although scholars have long debated the significance of such overlapping diction:163 in her 500-page doctoral dissertation, Carol Hughes Funk has meticulously charted the ebb and flow of academic opinion over the course of a century,164 while the recent work of Anita Riedinger and Alison Powell strongly supports the notion of direct borrowing from Beowulf on the part of the Andreas-poet.165 Powell’s study in particular, by far the most thorough to date, is based on an assessment of around ninety parallels of diction and phrasing that are uniquely shared by Beowulf and Andreas in the extant corpus of Old

158 On which, see above, pp. 85–91.
159 For a quixotic counter-argument to the ongoing tide of debate, see, for example, Schaar, ‘On a New Theory of Old English Poetic Diction’.
160 See, for example, Orchard, The Poetic Art of Aldhelm, esp. pp. 126–292.
161 On the widespread collection of Parallelstellen, see above, pp. 2 and 85.
162 I have in hand a project entitled ‘An Anglo-Saxon Formulary’, which seeks to collect examples of such parallel phrasing across the range of extant Anglo-Latin and Old English verse.
163 Significant stages in the debate include the contributions by Brooks, Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles; Cavill, Beowulf and Andreas: Two Maxims; Cook, ‘The Old English Andreas and Bishop Acca of Hexham’; Klaeber, Beowulf 769 und Andreas 1526ff; Peters, ‘The Relationship of the Old English Andreas to Beowulf’; Powell, ‘The Traditional Art of Andreas’; Schabram, Andreas und Beowulf: Parallelstellen als Zeugnis für literarische Abhängigkeit; Smithson, ‘The Old English Christian’.
164 Funk, ‘History of Andreas and Beowulf: Comparative Scholarship’.
165 Riedinger, ‘The Formulaic Relationship between Beowulf and Andreas’; Powell, ‘Verbal Parallels in Andreas’. 
English. It may be that the traditional etymology of the name Andreas (‘manly’) first suggested to the Andreas-poet the martial tone that runs right through the poem, and other broad parallels of theme and phrasing between Andreas and Beowulf have often been noted: the closing lines of Andreas depict the hero departing back home by sea in a manner which strongly recalls the funeral of Scyld Scefing, and there exist the oddly parallel (and equally odd) forms ealuscerwen (Beowulf, line 769a) and meoduscerwen (Andreas, line 1526b).

Moreover, the sheer number of parallels (and their extensive nature) seems highly suggestive, and surely bespeaks more than two poets merely drawing on the same traditional stock. It is not simply that the Andreas-poet refers to the sea as a ‘surging ocean’ (geofon geotende, lines 393a and 1508a), streets as ‘stone-adorned’ (stræte stanfage, line 1236a), an ancient construction as ‘the old work of giants’ (enta ærgeweorc, line 1235a), or a fine building as ‘high and horn-gabled’ (heah ond horngeap, line 668a) in the same way (unparalleled in the extant corpus) as the Beowulf-poet (cf. gifen geotende, line 1690a; stræt was stanfah, line 320a; enta ærgeweorc, line 1679a; heah ond horngeap, line 82a); but also in both poems people act ‘as was their custom’, wealth is measured, all ships float, blood wells, and the very expanse of the earth is assessed, all

167 Compare Andreas, line 25 (ægon geond þa peode swelc was þeaw hira) and Beowulf, line 178 (wikipedia); Beowulf, line 178 (wikipedia).

170 night falls, ships are piled with treasure, weapons melt, ships float, blood wells, and the very expanse of the earth is assessed, all
in ways which link these two poems perhaps more closely than any others in the extant corpus.

A still further chain of resonances links *Beowulf* not only to *Andreas*, but to the poem that immediately follows it in the Vercelli Book, namely *The Fates of the Apostles*, composed by Cynewulf.177 So much is clear simply from the opening lines of all three poems, presented here in sequence, with parallels highlighted in italics:

*Beowulf*, lines 1–3:

_Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum, _
þeodcyninga, _prym gefrunon, _
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon._

[Listen! We have heard of the power of the mighty kings of the spear-Danes in days long gone, how those noblemen did deeds of courage.]

*Fates of the Apostles*, lines 1–15:

_Hwæt! Ic þysne sang siðgeomor fand _
on seocum sefan, samnode wide _
hu þa æðelingas ellen cyðdon, _
torhte ond tireadige. Twelfe wæron, _
dædum domfäste, _dryhte_ gecorene, _
leofe on life. Lof wide sprang, _
miht ond mærðo, ofer middangeard, _
þeodnes þegna, _prym unlytel._

Halgan heape hlyt wisode _
þer hie _dryhtnes ðæ_ deman sceoldon, _
reccan fore rincum. Sume on Romebyrig, _
frame, fyrdhwate, _feorh ofgefón _
þurg Nerones nearwe searwe, _
Petrus ond Paulus. Is se apostolhad _
wide geweorðod ofer werþeoda!_ _

[Listen! Sad at departing, I, sick at heart, put together this poem, collected far and wide how those noblemen, famed and honour-blessed, revealed deeds of courage. Twelve there were, glory-fast in deeds, chosen by the Lord, beloved in life. The praise spread wide, the might and esteem, across the world, of the prince’s thegns, no little power. Their lot directed the holy band, to where they had to glorify the Lord’s law, tell it before men. Some in Rome, bold, battle-brave, gave up their lives through Nero’s narrow plotting: Peter and Paul. That apostolic state is widely honoured among men.]

*Andreas*, lines 1–11a:

_Hwæt! We gefrunan on fyrndagum _
_twelfe_ under tunglum _tireadige_ hæleð, _
þeodnes þegnas. No hira _prym_ aleg _
campraedenne þonne _cumbol hneotan, _

177 Both poems are conveniently edited by Brooks, ‘*Andreas*’ and ‘*The Fates of the Apostles*’.
syððan hie gedældon, swa him dryhten sylf,
heofona heahcyning, hlyt getæhte.
Þæt wæron mære men ofer eorðan,
frome folctogan ond fyrdhwate,
rofe rincas, þonne rond ond hand
on herelfelda helm ealgodon,
on meotudwange.

[Listen! We have heard of twelve honour-blessed heroes under the stars in days gone by, prince’s thegns. Their power did not fail in fighting, when banners clashed, after they departed as the Lord himself, the high king of the heavens directed their lot. They were men famed across the earth, bold war-leaders and battle-brave, daring warriors, when shield and hand defended the helmet on the battle-field, on the plain of fate.]

The tissue of overlapping phrasing between the three poems is surely striking, and the incongruity of such martial and heroic diction in a hagiographical context strongly suggests that it is Cynewulf and the Andreas-poet who are borrowing here.\(^\text{178}\) Earlier scholars often noted considerable parallels of diction and image between Beowulf the signed poems of Cynewulf (Elene, Juliana, Christ II, and Fates of the Apostles),\(^\text{179}\) and the notion that Cynewulf is deliberately echoing and adapting Beowulf in the opening lines of Fates of the Apostles seems supported by the similarity of phrasing of the half-line \textit{Lof wide sprang} (line 6b: ‘fame spread widely’) to a parenthetic half-line of like meaning at the beginning of Beowulf: \textit{bleed wide sprang} (line 19b: ‘renown spread widely’).\(^\text{180}\)

Apart from Cynewulf and the Andreas-poet, the most impressive parallels of diction have been noted between Beowulf and several of the biblical poems of the Junius manuscript.\(^\text{181}\) Perhaps the most striking overlap is in the description of the path towards Grendel’s mere taken by the Danish and Geatish warriors in Beowulf and that of the path towards the the Red Sea taken by the Israelites in Exodus: both are ‘narrow solitary paths, an unknown way’ (\textit{enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad} [Beowulf, line 1410 and Exodus, line 58]). Nor is this the only overlap: Clare Lynch, in the course of the most detailed survey to date, notes no fewer than twenty-seven parallels within the half-lines of both poems that are

\(^{178}\) See Orchard, ‘Both Style and Substance: the Case for Cynewulf’, pp. [20–1], where it is suggested that the Andreas-poet is borrowing from both Cynewulf and Beowulf; Powell, ‘The Traditional Art of Andreas’, Appendix C points out some 180 parallels between Andreas and the signed poems of Cynewulf that are unique in the extant corpus. In short, the Andreas-poet seems to be borrowing from and consciously echoing earlier Old English poets much in the manner of the formulaic methods of composition of generations of Anglo-Saxons who chose to compose their verse in Latin; see further, for example, Orchard, \textit{The Poetic Art of Aldhelm}, pp. 126–292; idem, ‘After Aldhelm: the Teaching and Transmission of the Anglo-Latin Hexameter’.


\(^{180}\) One might note further that in this line, Cynewulf indulges in characteristic sound-play or paronomasia (\textit{leofe . . . life . . . lop}, on which see Orchard, ‘Both Style and Substance: the Case for Cynewulf’), while in his, the Beowulf-poet may be punning on the name Beow (a name certainly associated with vegetation, as is the noun \textit{bleed} [‘growth’, ‘vigour’]: see above, pp. 103–4). The only two further examples of parallel phrases in the extant poetic corpus are again from Beowulf (line 1588b: \textit{Hra wide sprong}) and Cynewulf (Juliana, line 584b: \textit{Lead wide sprong}).

\(^{181}\) See, for example, Klaeber, ed., \textit{Beowulf}, pp. cx–cxiii, who gives a conservative overview.
unique in the extant corpus, as well as eleven shared compounds. While earlier scholars have argued both that Beowulf is borrowing from Exodus and vice versa (Klaeber, indeed, held both positions at different times), Lynch argues powerfully for the priority of Beowulf. More difficult to gauge at present are the apparent overlaps between Beowulf and Genesis A, which have been noted for a long time, with Klaeber asserting that the Beowulf-poet drew on the biblical epic. Among the more striking parallels are the description of God’s wrath against the people of the cities of the plains, who had offended against him ‘for a long time: he paid them their reward for that’ (lange þrage: him þæs lean forgeald, line 2546), since almost the same words in Beowulf are used to describe God’s retribution against the giants (lange þrage: he him ðæs lean forgeald, line 114). Likewise, it is notable that the famous words used twice in Beowulf to describe its hero as one ‘who was of mankind the strongest in might on that day of this life’ (se waes moncynnes mægenes strengest / on þæm dæge þysses lifes, lines 196–7; cf. se þe manna wæs megene strengest / on þæm dæge þysses lifes, lines 789–90) should appear to echo closely what the poet of Genesis A has to say about Nimrod, the giant hunter, of whom it is said ‘that of mankind he had the most might and strength in those days’ (paet he moncynnes mæste hæfde on þæm mældagum mægen and strengo, lines 1631–2). Similarly, Wealhtheow’s words to Hrothgar, encouraging him to leave his kingdom to his own sons when he ‘has to [go] forth to see the decree of fate’ (lines 1179b–1180a: þonne ðu forð scyle / metodsceaft seon) have a parallel in the description of the death of Abraham’s father in Genesis A, who ‘went forth, wise in years, to see the decree of fate’ (lines 1742b–1743: þa he forð gewat / misserum frod metodsceaft seon). Less convincing, perhaps are those parallels in Beowulf to the account of the battle of the four kings against five kings in Genesis A, where we learn in quick succession that the defeated kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were ‘bereft of their loved ones at the crowding of shields’ (line 1998: æt þæm linderodan leofum bedrorene; cf. Beowulf, line 1073: beloren leofum æt þæm lindplegan) and that the king of Elam ‘had war-success . . . controlled the place of slaughter’ (lines 2003b and 2005a: hæfde wigsigor . . . weold weslæwæ; cf. Beowulf, line 1554a: geweold wigsigor), since the apparent echoes in Beowulf are so widely scattered, and refer to the plight of Hildeburh in the Finn-episode and the victory of Beowulf himself over Grendel’s mother. Evidently, more work needs to be done further to identify

183 See, for example, Brodeur, ‘A Study of Diction and Style’; Klaeber, ‘Concerning the Relation between Exodus and Beowulf’; idem, ‘Noch einmal Exodus 56–58 und Beowulf 1408–10’.
185 Klaeber, ‘Die Ältere Genesis und der Beowulf’.
186 See above, p. 55.
187 On Nimrod (described in Genesis X.9 as ‘mightie in the earth, and he was a valiaunt hunter before our Lord’ [potens in terra, et erat robustus uenator coram Domino]), see further Orchard, Pride and Prodigies, pp. 77–8. According to Thiel, Grundlagen und Gestalt der Hebräischkenntnisse des frühen Mittelalters, p. 367, the Hebrew name Nimrod (also spelt Nemrod, Nemroth, and Nembroth) had a range of (generally inauspicious) meanings, according to a variety of patristic sources, including ‘bitterness’ (amaritudo), ‘temptation falling’ (tentatio descendens), ‘apostate’ (apostata), and ‘tyrant, exile, or transgressor’ (tyrannus uel profugus aut transgressor).
188 See further below, pp. 219–22.
unique parallels across the whole range of extant Old English verse, the better to assess the strength of the connections suggested here.

Nevertheless, it is clear from the study of both the Christian and secular traditions that underlie *Beowulf* that the poet was drawing together a great range and variety of materials in producing his work. The skill and sophistication with which the *Beowulf*-poet brought together these disparate traditions has already been apparent, and as in the subsequent chapters we turn to consider other aspects of his art, such as characterisation, combination of speech and action, and shifting points of view, the extent to which *Beowulf* differs both in kind and in quality not only from any putative sources or models, but also from all other extant Old English verse will, it is hoped, become clear. *Beowulf* may not be the only Old English poem to survive, but in its combination of artistry and humanity, it is surely the best.
Heroes and Villains

Speaking parts and spear-carriers: the cast of `Beowulf`

The sheer number of different characters mentioned in Beowulf is a major source of potential bewilderment for modern readers:1 over seventy are named in the course of the poem, but almost half of these appear only once.2 To be sure, some of these fleeting figures are well-attested outside Beowulf, such as the biblical Abel (line 108b),3 the legendary smith, Weland (line 455a), or the ill-reputed Goth, Eormenric (line 1201a),4 but many of the others pass by in a blur, named only in relation to other, more central, characters: all we ever learn of Yrmenlaf (line 1324a), for example, is that he is Æschere’s younger brother.5 In fact, only a dozen characters are named more than five times in the course of the poem, as follows (in descending order of frequency): Beowulf, Hrothgar, Grendel, Hygelac, Healfdene, Ecgtheow, Hrethel, Ongentheow, Weohstan, Finn, Wiglaf, and Wealhtheow.6 Yet even this list is misleading, since (as with many of those who appear less frequently in the poem) several of these figures are named mainly because of their relationship to other (generally more significant) char-

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1 For an early attempt at clarification, see Björkman, Studien über die Eigennamen im Beowulf.
3 In Anglo-Saxon contexts, Abel generally appears (as in Beowulf) alongside his brother and slayer, Cain; see further, for example, Emerson, ‘Legends of Cain’; Mellinkoff, ‘Cain’s Monstrous Progeny’ (Parts I and II); Williams, Cain and Beowulf. See further above, pp. 63–4 and 137–40.
4 See, for example, Lang, ‘Sigurd and Weland’; Nedoma, ‘The Legend of Wayland’; Brady, The Legends of Ermanaric. On all of these characters, see further above, pp. 105–10 and 114–16.
5 Shippey, Beowulf, p. 24, describes Yrmenlaf as ‘the poem’s most redundant character’. Other characters named only in respect of other, more important figures are as follows (the names of the characters they identify are given in brackets): Hæreth (Hygd): lines 1929a and 1981b; Ælfhere (Wiglaf): line 2604a; Beanstan (Breca): line 524a; Folcwalda (Finn): line 1089b; Froda (Ingeld): line 2025b; Garmund (Eomor): line 1962a; Hemming (Offa): line 1944b, (Eomor): line 1961b; Hereric (Heardred): line 2206b; Hoc (Hildeburh): line 1076b; Swerting (Hygelac): line 1203a; Wæl (Sigemund): line 897a.
6 For general background on these and other figures, see, for example, the useful book by Gillespie, A Catalogue of Persons Named in German Heroic Literature (700–1600).
acters: only the names of Beowulf, Hrothgar, Grendel, and Hygelac occur as independent characters with any real frequency at all.

So, for example, Healfdene is named in his own right only once, on his first appearance in the text (at line 57a);7 subsequently, his name is primarily used to identify his sons, particularly Hrothgar (fourteen times),8 although once he is named as the father of Heorogar (line 469a), and also in relation to his sword (line 1020b).9 An identical situation obtains with regard to Ecgtheow, Beowulf’s father: the first two times he appears (lines 263b and 373b), it is in his own right, with his special significance signalled by alliteration; elsewhere, he is named fourteen times, always as part of a stock phrase identifying his son.10 Likewise, Weohstan is mainly named in relation to his son, Wiglaf,11 and even King Hrethel’s name is invoked only three times in his own right (lines 374b, 2430b, and 2474b): otherwise he is named only to identify his son, Hygelac (lines 1485a, 1847b, 2358a, and 2992a), his mailcoat (Hrædlan laf, line 454b), and his sword (Hreðles lafe, line 2191b). Ecglaf is named five times in Beowulf, but only to identify his son, Unferth (lines 499b, 590b, 980b, 1465b, and 1808b); Otfrith’s name is a similar cipher, invoked to identify his sons (lines 2380b, 2394b, and 2612b), his father (line 2928b), and his mother (line 2932b). In a striking reversal of the usual pattern, the Swedish king, Ongentheow, is named first in relation to his killer, Hygelac (line 1968a),12 then his sons, Onela and Ohthere (lines 2387b and 2475a), before finally emerging in his last five appearances as an independent character with a role of his own (lines 2486a, 2924a, 2951a, 2961a, and 2986a). The attention paid to patronymics in the poem is indeed striking,13 and only underlines the sinister implications of the fact that (for example) we are never told the name of Heremod’s father,14 while we learn that Grendel’s father is not known at all (no hie fæder cunnon, line

7 It seems significant that of its seventeen appearances in the text, the name of Healfdene carries the main alliteration only here and in one other place (line 1064a).
8 At lines 189b, 268a, 344b, 645a, 1009b, 1040b, 1064a, 1474b, 1652b, 1699a, 1867a, 2011b, 2143b, and 2147a.
9 For the controversy surrounding the phrase brand Healfdenes (‘sword of Healfdene’) in line 1020b, which some would emend to bearn Healfdenes (‘son of Healfdene’), see, for example, Kuhn, ‘The Sword of Healfdenes’; idem, ‘Further Thoughts’; Mitchell, ‘Beowulf, line 1020b: brand or bearn’; Watanabe, ‘Final Words on Beowulf 1020b: brand Healfdenes’. One is tempted to suggest scribal eye-skip from a now-lost bearn Healfdenes, describing who gives Beowulf the gift (namely Hrothgar), to brand Healfdenes, describing what is given; certainly, two references to Healfdene (both identifying Hrothgar) occur in close proximity at lines 2143b (maga Healfdenes) and 2147a (sum Healfdenes), and as it stands the passage from lines 1009b to 1064a contains no fewer than four references to Healfdene.
10 At lines 529b, 631b, 957b, 1383b, 1473b, 1651b, 1817b, 1999b, 2177b, 2425b, 1550b, 2367b, 2398b, and 2587b.
11 Weohstan appears in his own right at line 2613b; at lines 2602b, 2752b, 2862b, 2907b, 3076b, and 3120b he appears in phrases used to identify Wiglaf, his son.
12 We are to learn nearly a thousand lines later, in lines 2961–4a, that it was in fact one of Hygelac’s men, namely Eofor, who actually slew Ongentheow, but the warrior’s deed is credited here (as often) to his lord.
13 In this context, and in addition to the fathers already named, one need only think of Hæthcyn Hrethling (line 2925a), Hygelac Hrethling (line 1923a), Seyld Scieing (line 4a), Sigemund Wælsing (line 877a), and Wulf Wonnecling (line 2965a).
14 On Heremod, see above, pp. 110–14.
1355b). Family relationships are everything in this close-knit text, which shows a keen interest both in blood-lines and (especially) in kings.

Tribal names, particularly those derived from personal names, play a similarly important role in the poem: Beowulf himself is four times simply called ‘the Geat’ (lines 640a, 1301b, 1785a, and 1792b), and if in the first part of the poem Hrothgar is twice designated ‘the aged Scylding’ (gamela Scylding, lines 1792a and 2105b), it is surely significant that in the second part of the poem Ongentheow is likewise twice described in parallel terms as ‘the aged Scylfing’ (gomela Scylfing, lines 2487b and 2968a). So too the Danes (Dene) are called by a multitude of allusive names, mainly for reasons of metre and alliteration: not just ‘bright-Danes’, ‘spear-Danes’, and ‘ring-Danes’ (Beorht-Dene, Gar-Dene, and Hring-Dene), but also ‘East Danes’, ‘West Danes’, ‘North Danes’, and ‘South Danes’ (East-Dene, West-Dene, Norð-Dene, and Suð-Dene). Likewise, their designation as Scyldings is varied: they are associated with ‘bounty’, ‘battle’, ‘victory’, and ‘greatness’ (Ar-Scyldingas, Here-Scyldingas, Sige-Scyldingas, Æðo-Scyldingas). Both the Geats (Geatas) and the Swedes (Swéon) are more simply described after the same pattern as the Danes, namely by elaborations on the basic tribal name (Geatmæcgas, Guð-Geatas, Æð-Geatas, Wæder-Geatas, Wéderas; Sweoðeod), by reference to an eponymous founding king (Hreþlingas; Scyldingas), and by elaborations on the founder’s eponym (Hreðmenn; Guð-Scylfingas). Of the three most important national or tribal groupings, however, it is important to stress that Beowulf’s own, the Geats, remain much the most shadowy, with debate continuing as to their precise geographical location and prevailing attitudes towards them in the earlier medieval period. But apart from the three main nations, we are presented in the poem with more than a dozen other family- or tribal-groupings (Brondingas, Brosingas, Eotan, Finnas, Francan, Fresan, Gifðas, Heaðo-Beardnan, Heaþo-Ræmas, Helmingas, Hetware, Hugas, Wægmundingas, Wendlas, and

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15 As Irving, *A Reading of ‘Beowulf’*, p. 16, notes: ‘Since, in all epic poetry, a patronymic is at least as necessary to a hero as a sword, Grendel’s title to heroic identity is wholly obscured.’
16 Considerable help in disentangling the complex and interconnected relationships between the main royal houses is offered by the genealogies on pp. xiv–xv above.
18 It is possible that near the beginning of the poem Onela is similarly described as the ‘battle-Scylfing’ (Heaðo-Scylfing, line 63a), but the passage in question may well be corrupt. Tribal names also seem to lie behind the designations Frescyning (line 2503b) and Merewiöing (line 2921a), both of which apparently refer to leaders of nations north and south, hostile to the Geats.
19 See above, pp. 69–72.
20 For *þeod-* as a compounding-element denoting ‘greatness’, compare within the poem *þeodcyning, þeodgestreon, þeodsceada*, and *þeodþrea*. It might also be noted that the Danes are twice described as ‘friends of Ing’ (Ingwine, lines 1044a and 1319a), while the term ‘half-Danes’ (Healf-Dene, line 1069a) seems restricted to the family of Hoe, Hnef, and Hildeburgh.
Wylfingas); as with the personal names, the impression is given of a rich and textured background against which the main action of the story takes place.\footnote{See too in this context such studies as Dederich, *Historische und Geographische Studien zum angelsächsischen Beowulfliede*; Leake, *The Geats of ‘Beowulf’*.}

By contrast with its many and various personal and tribal names, *Beowulf* seems curiously unspecific with regard to place:\footnote{For a recent account of a personal journey attempting to revisit the geography of *Beowulf*, see Overing and Osborn, *Landscape of Desire*.} apart from Heorot, which is named no fewer than nineteen times, and always takes part in the main alliteration,\footnote{The places in question are *Earnanaes* (line 3031b), *Freslond* or *Frysland* (lines 1126b and 2357b), *Hrefnawudu* or *Hrefnesholt* (lines 2925b and 2935a), *Hreosnaburh* (line 2477b), *Hronesnæss* (lines 2805b and 3136b), *Scedeland* or *Scedenig* (lines 2919b and 1686b), *Swiorice* (lines 2383b and 2495a), and *Wedermearc* (line 298b). Obviously, I take the places given here with different names to be identical; unlike Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 435, I do not consider *Freswæl* (line 1070a) a place-name, but a title, not unlike *Frescyning* (line 2503b).} only eight other locations are named, none more than twice.\footnote{Comparisons are often made with the *heorot hornum trum* (‘hart strong in horns’, line 1369a), pursued by hounds in a celebrated image; see, for example, Faraci, ‘La caccia al cervo nel *Beowulf*’; Higley, ‘*Aldor on ofre*’; Tripp, ‘The Exemplary Role of Hrothgar and Heorot’. For the image itself, see above, pp. 47–8.} Like Heorot itself, the name of which transparently means ‘hart’,\footnote{On *s/f* scribal confusion in *Beowulf*, see above, pp. 43–5; for the variation *eo/e*, one might note, for example, the spellings *Heorogar* (line 61a) and *Heregar* (line 467b).} a number of the place-names have a fictive quality and (again, like Heorot) allude to the natural world: the dead bodies of Beowulf and the dragon are laid out side by side at ‘Eagles’ bluff’ (*Earnanaes*, line 3031b), Beowulf is buried on ‘Whale’s bluff’ (*Hronesnæss*, lines 2805b and 3136b), and Ongentheow kills Hæthcyn at a place in Sweden variously called ‘Ravens’ wood’ or ‘Raven’s holt’ (*Hrefnawudu* or *Hrefnesholt*, lines 2925b and 2935a). In this context, one might well be tempted to emend the otherwise meaningless Geatish place-name *Hreosnaburh* (line 2477b), a site attacked by Ongentheow’s sons, to read *Hrefnaburh* (‘Ravens’ stronghold’):\footnote{On the suggested meanings of Unferth’s name, see below, p. 247; on Beowulf’s, see above, p. 121.} all the other place-names in the poem are national or regional.

Likewise, many of the personal names in the poem have a fictive quality, or at least one that seems particularly suited to their role. Several Old English poems make play with characters’ names,\footnote{See in general Frank, ‘Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse’; Robinson, ‘The Significance of Names in Old English Literature’; *idem*, ‘Personal Names in Medieval Narrative and the Name of Unferth in *Beowulf*’.} and *Beowulf* seems no exception.\footnote{Cf. Harris, ‘Hands, Helms, and Heroes: the Role of Proper Names in *Beowulf*’; Weise, ‘The Meaning of the Name “Hygd”’*.} Even leaving aside Unferth and Beowulf as two characters the meanings of whose names have been the source of long and sometimes bitter dispute,\footnote{On the many meanings of Unferth’s name, see below, p. 247; on Beowulf’s, see above, p. 121.} it is hard to escape the conclusion that the *Beowulf*-poet has deliberately named (for example) an unavenged warrior ‘recompense’ (*Withergyld*), a headstrong queen ‘power’ (*Thryth*), a sensible queen ‘reflection’ (*Hygd*), and the two characters who so savagely slay Ongentheow ‘boar’ (*Eofor*) and ‘wolf’ (*Wulf*). That a character named ‘glove’ (*Hondscio*) should end up in Grendel’s *glof* is in keeping...
with the same sensitivity (or lack of it), and if the Beowulf-poet did not invent the names Scyld (‘shield’) and Sigemund (‘victory-hand’), he certainly makes capital of their transparent meaning. Other characters who have been argued to possess meaningful names include Breca (‘breaker’, ‘wave’), Heremod (‘battle-mind’), Hygelac (‘thought-play’), and Wealhtheow (‘foreign servant’). Against such a background, it seems hardly surprising to find the last of the Wægmundings called ‘war-remnant’ (Wiglaf); he is but the last of a number of such ‘remnants’ in a poem that celebrates as it laments the end of a heroic age.

The sheer number and variety of characters depicted by the Beowulf-poet, when compared with his comparative disinterest in the specifics of place, signals his overarching concern for individuals and their individual perspectives. So much is evident not merely from the main narrative, but from the lovingly detailed depiction of episodes which do not obviously advance the main plot. In describing the monster-fights with Grendel and his mother, the Beowulf-poet shows himself much interested in showing a range of perspectives, allowing the audience to see things even through monstrous eyes; likewise, his focus in many of the digressive episodes is on the minor characters, even on the victims, a perspective that has sometimes been held to lend Beowulf its curiously melancholy, even elegiac feel. In many ways, the Beowulf-poet reveals himself to be less concerned with the actions of his characters than with their reactions to what is being done both to them and around them. Nowhere is this concern more evident than in the first two main monster-fights, and in the longest and most complex of the digressive episodes in the poem: the so-called Finn-episode.

Action and reaction: ‘The Finnsburh fragment’ and the Finn-episode

Much scholarly ink has been spilt on attempting to explain the relationship of The Finnsburh fragment to the Finn-episode in Beowulf, and of both texts to a

31 See further above, pp. 122–3.
32 See further above, pp. 103–5.
33 On Wealhtheow in particular, see below, pp. 219–21.
35 Also to be included on this list are Ecgalaf, Guthlaf, Heatholaf, Hunlafing, Oslaf, and Yrmenlaf.
36 Cf. Richardson, ‘Point of View and Identification in Beowulf’.
catalogue-passage in Widsith which mentions how one ‘Finn Folcwalding’ ruled the Frisians, and Hnæf ruled the Hocings ([weold . . .] Fin Folcwalding Fresna cynne . . . Hnæf Hocingum, lines 27 and 29a), and while the main structure of the general story seems agreed, there is great disagreement on the details. The conflict itself can be considered in two stages, beginning with an attack on the Danish prince, Hnæf, and his men while they are staying at Finn’s stronghold, perhaps in connection with a visit to Hildeburh, Hnæf’s sister and Finn’s queen; it is this first attack which is the focus of the Fragment. The episode, by contrast, deals with the aftermath of that battle, and describes Hildeburh’s grief at the outcome, the stalemate that exists between Finn and the survivors of Hnæf’s warrior-band. Hnæf himself is dead, and his funeral, shared with at least one of Hildeburh’s sons, is described in detail. In the episode, the focus then shifts to Hengest, who has in some sense inherited Hnæf’s mantle among the remnants of his warrior-band (wealaf; lines 1084a and 1098a); although he has sworn oaths to Finn and passes an uneasy winter alongside Finn’s men, nonetheless he seems clearly implicated in the revenge that follows, when Finn is killed and Hildeburh snatched back to her people.

The text of the Fragment itself is deeply problematical, and numerous emendations have been suggested to the version printed by George Hickes in 1705, which apparently derives from a now-lost single manuscript-leaf described as originating from a manuscript of ‘semi-Saxon’ homilies in Lambeth Palace Library. The Fragment clearly concerns an earlier stage of the narrative to that covered in the Finnsburh-episode in Beowulf, and again underlines the extent to which Beowulf as a whole tends to focus less on action than on reaction. The Fragment evidently describes the initial night-time conflict between the Danish leader Hnæf and his men, apparently attacked in their hall by troops loyal to

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40 Compare the appearances of Finn (lines 1068a, 1081a, 1096b, 1128b, 1146b, 1152b, and 1156a), Hnæf (lines 1069b and 1114b), Hoc (line 1076b), and Folcwalda (line 1089b) in Beowulf itself. See further above, pp. 115 and 128.

41 For the argument that more than one of Hildeburh’s sons is involved, see below, pp. 181–2.

42 Cf. above, pp. 70 and 110.

43 Cf. Kahrl, ‘Feuds in Beowulf’.

44 Hickes, Thesaurus, p. 192. The term ‘semi-Saxon’ refers to what might now be termed ‘classical’ Old English; Hickes used the term ‘Dano-Saxon’ to refer to the late and Scandinavian-influenced stage of the language immediately prior to the Norman Conquest. The widely held assumption that Hickes was the discoverer and transcriber of the Fragment is almost certainly wrong: as a fugitive charged with treason in the years 1691–9, he had neither the time nor the palaeographical expertise to be leafing through the manuscripts at Lambeth Palace. His close colleague and co-researcher Humfrey Wanley certainly had the palaeographical talent and acquaintance with medieval manuscripts to unearth and transcribe the Fragment, and in his extant letters records both his activities in Lambeth Palace Library in search of oddities, as well as his particular interest in paste-down and binding-fragments of precisely the right size to contain the Fragment. I am grateful to Dan Barrett for drawing all this material to my attention, and for suggesting Wanley as the likely discoverer of the text; much fuller documentation is to be found in his unpublished article ‘The Finnsburh fragment Reconsidered’. The notion that the Fragment is a forgery seems to me unlikely in the extreme: Hickes (and Wanley, for that matter) lacked the necessary motive and the close acquaintance with Old English heroic poetry required for such a task; no one would describe the Old English poetry composed in recent times by such scholars as J. R. R. Tolkien (who certainly had the necessary close acquaintance with Old English heroic poetry) as comparable in tone or style to the extant Fragment.
Finn. Finn himself is not named in the *Fragment*, although the action takes place at his stronghold (*Finnsburuh* is named in line 35a; the form *Finnesburuh* would, however, seem more likely). The poem itself, although naturally incomplete, nonetheless has a vitality and an immediacy that is both powerful and attractive, no more so than in the speech usually attributed to Hnæf at the beginning of the *Fragment*, as he apparently responds to a speech that evidently supplied an example of the so-called ‘watchman-device’ found elsewhere in heroic literature; the watchman has attributed the glint of moonlight on the weaponry of the approaching troops to a variety of possible causes, which Hnæf proceeds to dismiss (lines 3–12):

> ‘Ne ðis ne dagað eastan, ne her draca ne fleogeð, ne her ðisse healle hornas ne byrnað. Ac her førþ berada, fugelas singað, gyllðe græghama, guðwudu hlynneð, scyld scefte oncyð. Nu scyneð þes mona waðol under wolcnum. Nu arisað weadæda ðe ðísne folces nið fremman willað. Ac onwacnigeað nu, wigend mine, habbað eowre linda, hicgeaþ on ellen, winnað on orde, wesað onmode!’

[‘This is no dawning from the east, nor is a dragon flying here, nor are the gables of this hall burning. But here they are bearing forth (‘?), birds sing, the grey-coated [wolf] calls out, the war-wood resounds, shield speaks to shaft. Now this moon shines, wandering under the clouds, now woe-deeds arise, which will cause this people’s enmity. But wake up now, my warriors, take up your linden-shields, think on courage, strive in the vanguard, be resolute.’]

The use of such an evidently literary device is quite in keeping with the tone of the *Fragment* as a whole, which employs a number of standard devices, themes, and images well-attested in the extant Old English poetic corpus. So, for example, the *Fragment*, although brief, also bears witness to the so-called ‘beasts of battle’ theme (lines 5b–6a and 34b–35a), the notion that warriors must repay their mead to their lord (lines 39–40), and the device (well-known from *Beowulf*) whereby the poet claims never to have heard a more impressive thing before (lines 37–40).

The vigour and movement of this scene is finely conveyed by the bristling

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45 One might compare the form *Finneshorpe* in a Peterborough charter (Robertson, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 40).
46 The speaker is simply identified as a ‘battle-young king’ (*heapogeong cyning*, line 2b), although even this reading depends on Grundtvig’s emendation of the phrase *harrowgong cyning* of Hickes’ text; but several editors have considered that Hickes’ *næfre* (line 1b) conceals a version of Hnæf’s name, which only appears in the transmitted text at line 40a.
47 Sims-Williams, ‘‘Is it Fog or Smoke or Warriors Fighting?’’.
48 See further Rowland, ‘OE ealuscerwen/ meoduscerwen and the Concept of “Paying for Mead”’.
49 For the ‘I have not heard’ theme (*Ne gefrægn ic* and variants), see, for example, *Exodus*, line 285b, *Beowulf*, lines 575b, 581b–582, and 1027a; see further Parks, ‘‘I Heard’’ Formulas in Old English Poetry’.
verbs: no fewer than sixteen verbs ending in -að or -eð (or equivalent) are packed into only ten lines. Moreover these verb-forms are carefully clustered, moving the focus from might be seen (dagað . . . fleogeð . . . byrnað [lines 3–4]) to what might be heard (singað . . . gyllleð . . . hlynneð . . . oncwyð [lines 5–7]), and from an external consideration of the implications of those observations (sceade . . . arisað . . . fremman willað [lines 7–9]) to a stirring series of commands to get ready for the fray (onwachngeað . . . habbað . . . hicgeaþ . . . winnað . . . wesad [lines 10–12]); indeed, even the last four injunctions show careful patterning, alternating between exhortations to physical action and mental preparation.50 The immediacy of all this action is underscored in this passage by overlapping repeated use of the terms ‘here’ (her . . . her . . . her [lines 3–5]), ‘this’ (ðis . . . ðisse . . . þes . . . ðisne [lines 3–9]), and ‘now’ (Nu . . . Nu . . . nu [lines 7–10]).

Similar concern with form and structure is apparent elsewhere in the Fragment, despite its incomplete state: the references in lines 3–7a to the sounds and sights of the approaching battle are recapitulated briefly after the initial exchange, when reference is made to the sound of slaughter and the clamour in the hall (wælstehta gehlyn, line 28b; buruhðele dynede, line 30b), as well as to the ‘beasts of battle’ motif and the contrast between the dark night and the light glinting off weapons that opens the Fragment (lines 34b–36):

Hræfen wandrode,  
sweart and sealobrun.  
swylce eal Finnsburuh  
fyreну wære.

[The raven wheeled, dark and dusky; there stood a sword-gleam as though all Finnsburh were aflame.] Such parallels within the Fragment effectively provide a framing envelope-pattern that accounts for three-quarters of the extant text, and together demonstrate the skill of the poet. Likewise, no fewer than fifteen of the surviving forty-eight lines of the Fragment are in direct speech; it seems further likely that a speech follows shortly after the Fragment breaks off.51 But these are not the lengthy, contemplative speeches that characterise so much of Beowulf: the only two complete speeches in the Fragment are only ten and four lines long respectively.52 Again, pace and action seems to have been the chief concerns of the poet who produced the Fragment. Although we have no way of knowing how much of the text has been lost, what survives seems to indicate that in purely literary terms the loss has been great.

50 Such clustering might well suggest that the otherwise opaque form forþ berað (line 5), which apparently does not fit into this ordered sequence, conceals a reference to further noise.
51 The parallelism of lines 22–3 and 46–8 might suggest that speech is intended at some point after line 48. In the first case, a warrior (either Garulf or Guðere: the text is not clear) has asked (fraegn) who is holding the door (hwa þa duru heolde), and is answered by Sigeferþ; in the second case, just after mention has been made of those who held the door (ac hig ða duru heoldon, line 42b), a wounded warrior is asked (fraegn) by a leader (either Hnaef or Finn; the text is not clear) two questions, the first of which concerns how the warriors are bearing their wounds, and the second of which is incomplete. Presumably some answer in direct speech follows.
By contrast with the forty-eight action-packed lines of the Fragment, the almost one hundred lines of the Finn-episode in Beowulf seem curiously detached and reflective.\(^5\) Quite apart from the fact that the episode first focuses quite literally on the aftermath of the conflict described in the Fragment, describing in grisly detail the full horror of Hnæf’s funeral-pyre (lines 1107–24) and the inner turmoil of Hengest (lines 1127b–1145), there is little in the way of genuine action in the episode except for a deliberately brief and telescoped account of the vengeance wrought for Hnæf, namely the killing of Finn and the return of his queen, Hildesburh, Hnæf’s sister, back to her people, the Danes. This action-packed climax to the episode is recounted in five breathless half-lines, in which, significantly, all the verbs are expressed in the passive (lines 1151b–1153):\(^5\)

\[
\text{Da wæs heal hroden} \\
\text{feonda feorum, swilce Fin slægen,} \\
\text{cyning on corþre, ond seo cwen numen.}
\]

[Then was the hall adorned with the bodies of enemies, likewise Finn slain, a king among his retinue, and the queen taken.]

The use of passive forms here is surely telling: Finn and his queen have simply become pawns in a wider scheme, folk to whom things happen beyond their control. Likewise, the bulk of the episode as a whole focuses on two protagonists, namely Hildesburh and Hengest, and specifically on their reactions to the action in which they have become involved. Hildesburh in particular is at the heart of the episode, being named at the beginning (line 1071), towards the middle (line 1114), and appearing twice, now stripped even of her name, at the end (lines 1153b and 1158a).\(^5\) The Beowulf-poet is at particular pains to highlight her impotence and passivity, as well as her innocence: she is portrayed

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\(^5\) The precise extent of the Finn-episode in Beowulf is a matter of hot debate; Klaeber’s relatively cautious estimate is that the episode extends from lines 1069–1245 (Beowulf, p. 170), but such an account requires the episode to begin in mid-sentence; similar difficulties exist with regard to estimating where the episode breaks off, as we shall see.

\(^5\) I preserve here the manuscript-reading *hroden* at 1151b, although it apparently violates a “rule” of Old English poetry that the fourth stressed syllable in a line does not participate in the main alliteration; most editors read *roden* (‘reddened’). Yet the precise alliterative status of *h*- in Beowulf is uncertain, as has been pointed out by (amongst others) Taylor and Davis, ‘Some Alliterative Misfits’, pp. 615–20. Moreover, elsewhere in Beowulf (notably at 574b) the fourth stressed syllable does apparently participate in the main alliteration (the full line there reads *Hwæþere me gesælde þæt ic mid sweorde ofsloh*), although here too editors tend to emend the apparent anomaly away. The notion that Finn’s hall is ‘decorated’ (rather than simply being ‘reddened’) with the bodies of enemies helps to connect it with Heorot, which at this point in the narrative is adorned with Grendel’s torn-off arm (lines 833b–836 and 927–8). In what is surely a punning allusion to the grim decoration, the poet explicitly says that before the celebration-feast Heorot was ‘decorated with arms’ (*folnum gefrætwod*, line 992a). For other puns in the poem as a whole, see above, pp. 73–8.

\(^5\) It is intriguing to note that the author of the eleventh-century Encomium Emmae Reginae employs precisely the same structural device, deliberately highlighting Emma, Cnut’s queen, at the beginning, middle, and end of his work. As the author explicitly states (Encomium Emmae Reginae, ed. Campbell, p. 6, lines 4–5): *Quod ita esse ipse fatebere, meque ab eius laudibus nasquam accipies deiure, si prima meditis, atque si extima sagaci more conferas primis* [‘But you will admit that this is the case, and allow that I nowhere deviate from her praises, if you wisely compare the beginning with the middle, and the end with the beginning’]. See further Orchard, ‘The Literary Background to the Encomium Emmae Reginae’, p. 163.
The notion that the tragedy of the situation at Finnsburh derives from misplaced (or broken) ‘good faith’ (treowe, line 1072a) is one that again runs like a thread through the story, and seems a point of focus for the Beowulf-poet, who returns to the theme immediately after the Finn-episode, as we shall see. More important here is the utter exoneration of Hildeburh from responsibility: she suffers a terrible reversal of fortune (lines 1078–80a) ‘guiltlessly’ (unsynnum, line 1072b); and our sympathies are entirely with this ‘sorrowful lady’ (geomoru ides, line 1075b). The poet clearly echoes the last phrase in his next brief description of Hildeburh, as ‘the lady grieved, sang sorrowful songs’ (ides gnornode, geomrode giddum, lines 1117b–1118a) at the family funeral pyre. But it is the final reference to Hildeburh which really demonstrates the extent of her fall from grace: having lost a brother and at least one son, she now loses her husband in the revenge-killing of Finn, and is unceremoniously abducted (seo cwen numen, line 1153b). Worse, the poet’s description of her restoration to Denmark makes it clear that, deprived even of her name, Hildeburh has become a mere chattel, simply listed alongside the other plunder (lines 1154–9a):

Sceotend Scyldinga to sceypon feredon
eal ingesteald eorðcyninges,
swylce hie æt Finnes ham findan meahton
sigla, searogimma. Hie on sælade

56 In fact the manuscript reads he (‘he’) at line 1079b, defended by some editors as a reference to Finn; the preceding heo (‘she’) in line 1078a surely strengthens the case for emendation. Likewise, most editors emend manuscript hild plegan (‘war-play’) to lindplegan at line 1073b (fol. 153r19) for reasons of alliteration; the scribal substitution of synonyms is apparently relatively frequent in Beowulf (see above, pp. 51 and 87–8), and in any case the element hild- (or hilde-) is found twice more on the same folio (at 153r11 and 17), making dittography a possibility.

57 On the plural forms, see below, pp. 181–2.
The warriors of the Scyldings carried off to the ships all the possessions of the great king that they could find at Finn's home, jewels and precious gems. They carried off the noble woman on sea-voyage to the Danes, led her to her people.]

The deliberate parallelism of the phrasing here (to scypon feredon . . . to Denum feredon, lines 1154 and 1158) surely only underlines Hildeburh’s reduction in status to a mere trophy, one to be carted home with the rest of the spoils.

What is striking about each of the references to Hildeburh is the Beowulf-poet’s deep sympathy for her plight; likewise, it is notable that in introducing the episode, the poet is careful to focus attention on the primary victims of the first encounter, namely Hnæf and the sons of Finn. Indeed, this focus on the victims considerably undermines and undercuts the ostensible joy of the celebration-feast in Heorot, at which the Finn-episode apparently forms part of the entertainment (lines 1063–70):58

All commentators have felt these lines to form a jarring transition; but it is particularly intriguing to note the Beowulf-poet’s deliberate blurring of events in Hrothgar’s hall and events within the episode itself, telescoping the two together: the description of Hrothgar himself as ‘Healfdene’s battle-leader’ (Healfdenes hildewisan, line 1064) seems echoed in the designation of Hnæf as ‘the hero of the Half-Danes’ (hæleð Healfdena, line 1069a); similarly juxtaposed is the parallel syntax describing how on the one hand Hrothgar’s poet ‘had to mention’ the tale (mænan scolde, line 1067b), and on the other Hnæf ‘had to fall’ (feallan scolde, line 1070b); but perhaps most striking is how the description of the deaths of Hnæf and Finn’s sons, killed together in hall-conflict, is described as ‘hall-entertainment’ (healgamen, line 1066a): we are shortly to hear the same dreadful slaughter described as ‘linden-play’ (lindplegan, line

58 Along with several editors, I insert the word be in line 1068a, since it could easily have dropped out through eye-skip after scolde in line 1067b; without it, the syntax of the passage is decidedly curious.
In very much the same way, the end of the episode is signalled by some transitional lines which might plausibly refer either to celebrations marking the homecoming of Hildeburh, or to the end of the song sung in Heorot describing the Frisian slaughter, or to both (lines 1159b–62a):

Leoð wæs asungen,  
gleomannes gyd. Gamen eft astah,  
beorhtode bencsweg; byrelas sealdon  
win of wunderfatum.

[Song was sung, a glee-man’s lay; joy rose up again, bench-noise brightened; servants proffered wine from wondrous vessels.]

One might note in passing that the alliterating elements *gomen* and *gid* that signal the beginning of the episode (line 1065) are echoed in reverse (*gyd* and *gamen*) at the end, so forming a kind of chiastic envelope-pattern around the episode as a whole. That the scene has truly shifted back to Heorot is only made clear by a reference to Wealhtheow bustling in to serve a drink to her lord, husband, and king, Hrothgar (lines 1162b–8a):

Þa cwom Wealþeo forð  
gan under gyldnum beage, þær þa godan twegen  
sæton suhtergefæderan; þa gyt wæs hiera sib ætgædere,  
æghwylec oðrum trywe. Swylce þær Unferþ ðyle  
æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga; gehwylc hiora his ferhþe treowde,  
þæt he hæfde mod micel, þeah þe he his magum nære  
arfæst æt ecga gelacum.

[Then Wealtheow came forth, striding under a golden diadem, where the goodly pair, sat together, uncle and nephew; at that time their kinship was still intact, each true to the other. Likewise Unferð the *þyle* sat there at the foot of the lord of the Scyldings; each of them trusted his spirit, that he had great courage, even though he was not merciful to his kinsmen at the play of swords.]

That the poet marks these lines out by a change in metre suggests that they are meant to be taken together. But there is surely something disquieting (to say the least) about the picture of Wealtheow’s stately entrance coming so hard on the picture of the hapless and helpless Hildeburh’s return to her home; after all, she too was once a stately queen, serving great men their liquor in a foreign hall. But it is not simply Wealtheow’s juxtaposition with Hildeburh that undercuts her; her very name (which appears to mean ‘foreign servant’ or somesuch) seems clearly not her own, even if it accords well with her function pouring drinks alongside the other ‘servants’ (*byrelas*, line 1161b) mentioned only the line before.60 And since (as the episode shows) events proved that Hildeburh had little cause to praise the ‘faith’ of the Jutes (*Eotena treowe*, line 1072a), it is certainly disconcerting to see the same element of ‘faith’ raised here in consecutive (and parallel) lines with respect to Hrothgar and his nephew Hrothulf on the

59 On the emendation *lindplegan* (for manuscript *hild plegan*) see n. 56 above.

60 On the use of meaningful names in *Beowulf*, see above, pp. 172–3.
one hand (æghwylc . . . trywe, line 1165a), and Unferth (gehwylc . . . treowde, line 1166b) on the other; there is reason to suppose that subsequent events in Danish history proved such faith misplaced. It is surely no coincidence that when Wealththeow eventually speaks, first to Hrothgar (lines 1169–87), then to Beowulf (lines 1216–31), in both cases making what history was to prove a fruitless attempt to secure the succession for her sons, neither of those addressed actually answers. Wealththeow, like Hildeburh, is a passive onlooker in a much wider and more vicious game; and it is to such victims that the Beowulf-poet persistently draws our attention.

Within the episode itself, similar sympathy for the victims of heroic violence is witnessed in the gruesome account the Hnæf’s funeral pyre (lines 1107–24):

\[
\text{Ad wæs geæfned ond icge gold ahæfen of horde. Here-Sclyldinga betst beadorinca wæs on bæl gearu.}
\]

\[
\text{Æt þæm ade wæs eþgesyne swatfah syrce, swyn ealgylden, eofer irenheard, æþeling manig wundum awyrded; sune on wæle crungon.}
\]

\[
\text{Het ða Hildeburh æt Hnæfes ade hire selfre suna sveoloðe befaðstan,}
\]

\[
\text{banfatu bærnan ond on bæl don earme on eaxle. Ides gnornode, geomrode giddum. Guðrec astah,}
\]

\[
\text{wand to wolcnum wælfyra maest, hlynode for hlawe; hafelan multon, 1115}
\]

\[
\text{bengeato burston, ðonne blod ætspranc, lig ealle forswaelg, gæsta gifrost, þara de þær guð fornarn bega fœloes; wæs hira blæd scacen.}
\]

\[
[The pyre was prepared, and splendid (?) gold taken up from the hoard; the best of the battle-warriors of the warlike Scyldings was made ready on the funeral-pile. At that pyre was easily seen the blood-stained corselet, the all-golden swine, the iron-hard boar, many a noble killed by wounds; fine men had fallen in the slaughter. Then Hildeburh ordered}
\]

61 See further below, pp. 245–6.

62 On the careful choreography of speeches in the poem as a whole, see below, pp. 203–8.

63 Here I adopt the emendations ad (‘pyre’) for manuscript ad (‘oath’) at line 1107a, suna (‘sons’) for manuscript sunu (‘son’) at line 1115a, and guðrec (‘battle-smoke’) for manuscript guðrinc (‘battle-warrior’) at line 1118b. In the first case, ð for d (and vice versa) is a relatively common scribal error in the text (see above, pp. 42–6), and the confusion is likely due to the fact that an ‘oath’ (ad) has been mentioned in the immediately preceding lines 1095–1106. For the second case, see below, p. 182; on scribal confusion of u for a, see above, pp. 42–6. In the third case, mention of ‘battle-smoke’ (guðrec) seems more likely in context than to suggest that the phrase ‘the battle-warrior mounted the pyre’ (guðrinc astað) somehow stands alone, arresting as such a half-line might be: it is noticeable that in the description of Beowulf’s own cremation, the poet comments that ‘heaven swallowed the smoke’ (heofon rece swealg, line 3155b) immediately after describing the grief of the chief female mourner (as here). On scribal transmission of i for e (and failure to expand a nasal suspension), see above, pp. 45–6; it is noteworthy that the manuscript reads ‘here ric’ for hererinc just over fifty lines later, at line 1176a. For a defence of the manuscript-readings, see (for example), Klaeber, ed., Beowulf, pp. 173–4; Wrenn, ed., Beowulf, pp. 140–1.
her own sons to be entrusted to the fire at Hnæf’s pyre, their bone-vessels burn and be placed on the funeral-pile, wretched, side by side. The lady grieved and sang sorrowful songs. The battle-smoke went up, curled to the clouds, the greatest of slaughter-fires roared before the grave-mound; heads melted, wound-gashes burst; as blood spurted out, the cruel biting of the body. Flame, the greediest of spirits, swallowed all of those that battle took off of both peoples; their flowering had passed away.]

The incremental repetition Ad . . . Æt þæm ade . . . æt Hnaefes ade (lines 1107a, 1110a, and 1114b) focuses attention increasingly on the fact that this is no unimportant funeral, but the cremation of some mighty men; the first two clauses are expressed in the passive, but it is Hildeburh herself who must actively entrust her brother and ‘her own sons’ (hire selfre suna, line 1115a) to the pyre.64 Scholarly uncertainty over the number of Hildeburh’s sons stems primarily from a desire to retain the apparently singular manuscript-form sunu (‘son’) in line 1115a; yet scribal confusion of u for a (and vice versa) is certain elsewhere in the Beowulf-manuscript,65 and indeed many of those who retain the singular form here nonetheless emend the precisely parallel form in line 2013a, where Beowulf describes how he was placed by Hrothgar in a position of honour alongside the Danish king’s own sons (the manuscript clearly reads wið his sylfes sunu).66 But acceptance that Hildeburh loses more than one son only accords with the two previous assertions that the tale is to be one concerning Finn’s sons (Finnes eaferum, line 1068a), and that Hildeburh was deprived of ‘sons and brothers’ (bearnum ond broðrum, line 1074a).67 Moreover, a plural reading here makes it possible to construe 1117a as it stands, without emending manuscript earme (‘wretched’) to eame (‘uncle’):68 the phrase is then grimly appropriate: it is as fitting for an ‘arm’ (earm) to be associated with a shoulder as it is for living warriors to fight shoulder-to-shoulder.69 But these ‘wretched’ (earme) warriors are laid side-by-side, beyond any call to arms (of any kind).70 Equally bitter is the poet’s focus on the bloody corselet and boar-image, the latter presumably a protective image on the crest of a helmet:71 neither has offered its promised protection to the dead warriors they once covered. The cremation itself is depicted as a kind of martial conflict, with ‘war-smoke’
(guðrec, line 1118b), ‘the greatest of slaughter-fires’ (wælfyra mæst, line 1119b), and a horrifyingly graphic description of freshly inflicted wounds (lines 1120b–1122a). Finally, the depiction of the funeral-pyre is implicitly linked to the rest of the episode: the phrase ‘those that battle took off there’ (para de þær guð fornarm, line 1123b) harks back to a similar description of the fateful fray itself (Wig ealle fornarm, line 1080b), while the final comment that ‘their flowering had passed away’ (wæs hira blæd scacen, line 1124b) looks ahead to the end of winter, and the beginning of Hengest’s revenge (Da wæs winter scacen, line 1136b).

Hengest too cuts rather a sorry figure in the context of the episode. He is named early on, in a brief passage which sets up his opposition to Finn (lines 1080b–1085a):

Wig ealle fornarm
Finnes þegnas nemne feaum anum,
þæt he ne mehte on þæm meðelstede
wig Hengeste wiht gefeohtan,
ne þa wealafe wige forþringan
þeodnes ðegne.

[Battle took off all Finn’s thegns except only a few, so that he could not in that meeting-place bring in any way the battle to finish against Hengest, nor dislodge by battle those survivors of woe from the chief-tain’s thegn.]

This passage is an excellent example of the compact style of the Beowulf-poet, who teases out the grim complexities of the situation through careful sound-play. The threefold repetition of the same term for ‘battle’ (Wig...wig...wige, lines 1080b, 1083a, and 1084b) not only identifies the main cause of the miserable dilemma, but is part of an orchestrated repetition of the same limited number of sounds, chiefly f, w, and þ that links individual lines. Finn and Hengest are likewise linked by alliteration in consecutive lines (he...Hengeste, lines 1082–3), as well as by parallel syntax: the reference to ‘Finn’s thegns’ (Finnes þegnas, line 1081a) is closely followed by one to Hengest as ‘the chief-tain’s (presumably Hnæf’s) thegn’ (þeodnes ðegne, line 1085a), in a way which only underscores the pain and problem on both sides, and the extent to which Finn and Hengest have become locked together in a deadly association.

Both sides make a truce, negotiated between Finn and Hengest, who is most likely a Jute in Hnæf’s service. The Finn-episode, like that of Sigemund and Heremod, appears to play a double function according to the audience’s perspective. From the point of view of most of the characters within the poem, the immediate rationale for the inclusion of the story of the deaths of Finn and Hnæf, would appear to be that of bolstering Danish pride and celebrating Beowulf’s victory: in this case too the Danes recover from a humiliating setback.

72 Compare the gruesome details supplied by Owen-Crocker, Four Funerals, pp. 51–5.
73 For a range of views on Hengest’s tribal affiliations, see, for example, the summary tables provided by Aurner, Hengest, pp. 78–88.
74 On which, see above, pp. 105–14.
in a hall (the death of their leader, Hnæf, as opposed to Grendel’s continued predations) through the killing of the perpetrator (Finn, as opposed to Grendel) through the agency of a foreign warrior (Hengest, as opposed to Beowulf). Tom Shippey has argued that at least two of the audience, namely Wealththeow and Beowulf, see in the story a possible warning about the forthcoming wedding of Hrothgar’s daughter Freawaru to Ingeld, an episode with which, as Ted Irving has indicated, the story has a number of close parallels. As we have seen, the Beowulf-poet himself offers yet another perspective to the audience of his own poem, focusing not on the characters of Finn and Hnæf, as might be expected, but on those of Hildeburh and Hengest.

The climax to the part of the episode which focuses on Hengest is told as follows (lines 1125–41):

Gewiton him ða wigend wica neosian, 1125
freondum befeallen, Frysland geseon,
hamas ond heaburh. Hengest ða gyt
wælfagne winter wunode mid Finne
eal unhlitme, eard gemunde,
þeah þe he ne meahte on mere drifan
hringedstefnan; holm storme weol,
won wið winde, winter yþe beleac
isgebinde, ðfðæt ðper com
gear in geardas, swa nu gyt deð,
þa ðe syngales sele bewitiað,
wuldortorhtan weder. ða wæs winter scacen,
fæger foldan bearm. Fundode wrecca,
gist of gearðum; he to gyrnwæce
swiðor þohte þonne to sælade,
gif he torngemot þurhtean mihte
þæt he Eotena bearn inne gemunde.

[Then the warriors, deprived of friends, went off to their dwellings, to visit Frisia, the homes and chief stronghold. Hengest still stayed with Finn a slaughter-stained winter, with ill-fated courage; he kept his homeland in mind, though he could drive his ring-prowed ship on the sea: the ocean seethed with storms, buffeted against the wind; winter locked the waves, icebound, until another year came into the homefields, just as it still does, the seasons regularly keeping order, gloriously bright weather. The winter had passed, the lap of the earth was fair; the exile was anxious, the guest to get away; he thought more about vengeance than about a sea-voyage, if he could bring about a hostile encounter so that he might bring to mind the children of the Jutes in the land.]

75 Shippey, Old English Verse, pp. 31–2; idem, Beowulf, pp. 32–3; Whitelock, Audience, pp. 34–8.
77 In line 1130a, the word ne is missing in the manuscript, although it is easy to see why it could have dropped out as one of a sequence of words beginning in a similar way (gemunde þeah þe he meahte); the end of line 1128b and the beginning of line 1129a have evidently been run together in the manuscript, which reads finnel unhlitme.
The appalling weather acts as a perfect metaphor for Hengest’s brooding thoughts, and a solution comes in the spring when three (presumably Danish) warriors act: first the son of Hunlaf presents Hengest a sword which may well have been used to kill Jutes on Finn’s side, since ‘its edges were well-known among the Jutes’ (þæs wæron mid Eotenum ecge cuðe, line 1145), then Guthlaf and Oslaf utter reproach for their shameful situation (sorge mændon, ætwiton weana dæl, lines 1149b–50a). In so doing, they appear explicitly to break the terms of the original treaty between Finn and Hengest, the details of which are given as follows (lines 1095–1106):

[Then they made a pledge on two sides, a secure peace-treaty. Finn swore oaths to Hengest with ill-fated courage that he would treat the survivors honourably in the judgment of wise men, so that no man there should break the pact with words or deeds, nor ever mention it in vicious spite, even though they followed the slayer of their ring-giver, lordless, since they were so forced to do. If any of the Frisians, through dangerous talk should ever call to mind that murderous hatred, the sword’s edge should later . . . ]

The three Danes who bring matters to a head may well be related, if the reference in Arngrímr Jónsson’s Latin abstract of the now-lost Skjöldunga saga to three Scylding brothers called Gunnleifus (Old English Guthlaf), Oddleifus (Old

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78 The connection of the weather and the conflict is made explicit in the verbal echo between the description of the funeral pyre of young men (wæs hira blæd scacen, line 1124b) and the end of winter (Ða wæs winter scacen, line 1136b), especially since the word blæd carries the sense both of ‘glory’ and of ‘vegetation’.

79 This is to assume that Hunlafing (line 1143a) is not a sword (with a name formed like those of Nægling [line 2680b] and Hrunting [lines 1490b, 1659b, and 1807b]), but the unnamed son of a dead Dane, Hunlaf. For a range of alternative suggestions, see, for example, Klaeber, ed., Beowulf, pp. 175–6.

80 Cf. Nicholson, ‘Hunlafing and the Point of the Sword’.

81 The manuscript reads frecnen at 1104b, but the emendation is a common one; more problematic is the apparently unfinished syntax of line 1106b, so causing some editors to emend manuscript syðdan, usually to an infinitive in -an (Klaeber invents a verb sedan [‘declare’, ‘settle’], formed on the model of the noun sod [‘truth’: cf. deman/dom]. The unfinished syntax seems, however, not inappropriate in its implied threat, and, following Mitchell and Robinson, ed., Beowulf, I retain it here. For the phrase eæn unhlitme of line 1097a (the manuscript reads unflitme), see, for example, Tolkien, Finn and Hengest, p. 120, n. 63; Vickrey, ‘Un[fl]litme “voluntarily” in Beowulf Line 1097’. There seems a deliberate echo in the phrase eæl unhlitme in line 1129a.
English Oslaf), and Hunleifus (Old English Hunlaf) is to be credited: 82
Hunlafing would then be a nephew of the other two; his father’s name also
appears (in the form ‘Hunlapus’) alongside other names from legend, including
Rudolphus (Old English Hrothulf), in British Library, Cotton Vespasian D. IV. 83
The reference to a treaty existing on two sides (on twa healfa, line 1095b),
rather than on both sides, makes the pact very much a personal deal between
Finn and Hengest, and the possible repetition of the charged phrase ‘with
ill-fated courage’ (elne unhlitme, lines 1097a and 1129a) makes clear the extent
of the risks each is taking. 84 To be sure, it is not the Frisians who mention the
shame of Hengest’s party (gemænden, line 1101b), but Guðlaf and Oslaf
(mændon, line 1149b); nor is it the Frisians who call to mind (myndgiend,
1105b) the grim events, but Hengest himself (gemunde, lines 1129b and 1141b).
Nonetheless, a ‘sword’s edge’ certainly settles things. 85
If both sides in the Finn-episode seem culpable, in that both sides seem to
break a real or implied trust in their respective attacks, then it is equally true that
innocents on both sides suffer. By placing the episode in the context of the
rejoicing in Heorot after the defeat of Grendel, the poet offers a grim warning of
disasters to come, for he closes his account of the feasting and celebrations at
Heorot on a darker note, stressing the fact that for all their confidence, the future
for the feasting Danes is far from certain (lines 1232b–1237a):

Þær wæs symbla cyst;
druncon win weras. Þyrð ne cuðon,
geosceaf Grimne, swa hit agangen wearð
eorla manegum, syþðan æfen cwom
ond him Hroþgar gewat to hofe sinum,
rice to ræste.

[There was the best of feasts: men drank wine; they did not know fate, the
grim destiny, as it came to pass, once evening came, and Hrothgar
went to his home the powerful one to bed.] 1235

These words contain a grim echo of those that heralded Grendel’s first attack:
then too, the Danes went to bed after feasting in ignorance of what fate had in
store (sorge ne cuðon, wonsceafí wera, lines 119b–20a). 86 Likewise, when we
are told that after their celebratory feasting the Danes ‘sank to sleep’ (Sigon pa
to slaepe, line 1251), we cannot fail to be reminded that the scene that greets
Grendel on his first arrival at Heorot is similarly curiously calm: there, the
warrior-band slumbers after their celebration-feast (swefan æfter symble, line

82 Benediktsson, ed., Arngrimi Jonae Opera, IX.336.
83 See Chambers, Widsith, p. 254.
84 For the textual problems associated with this phrase, see above, pp. 173 and 184.
85 Bearing in mind the aural background to Beowulf (on which see further above, pp. 61–9), one is
tempted to assume a pun: one might easily mistake the phrase sweordes ecg (‘sword’s edge’) for
sweorde secg (‘a man with a sword’), especially since in Beowulf swords and men are often identi-
ified, and in the dénouement to the episode both a specific man and a specific sword are highlighted.
However the phrase is construed, the deep sense of implied threat remains.
86 See below, pp. 238–9.
119a). In that case, the apparently peaceful image soon acquires grim overtones as Grendel snatches up thirty warriors to take home and eat. A later passage, ironically discussing the ultimate fate of all men in the wake of Grendel’s own demise, repeats the same image in substantially the same words (lines 1002b–1008a):

No þæt yðe byð
to befleonne, fremme se þe wille,
ac gesecan sceal sawlberendra,
nyðe genydded, niþða bearne,
grundbuendra gearwe stowe,
þær his lichoma legerbedde fæst
swefþ æfter symle.

[That is not an easy thing to escape, let him do it who will, but, forced
by necessity, each of the children of men, earth-dwellers possessing a
soul, must seek the place prepared, where, secure in the bed of death, he
will sleep after the feast.]

This poignant image of mortality, stressed through repetition (sawlberendra . . .
niþða bearne / grundbuendra, lines 1004 and 1005b–1006a) and punning (nyðe
genydded, line 1005a), portrays life as a feast that is followed by the certain sleep
of death. As the Danes soon find out, falling asleep after their celebration-feast,
Hildeburh and Wealhtheow are not the only grieving and anxious mothers:
Grendel has a mother too, who is about to make her presence felt.

Sons and mothers: fighting the kin of Cain

The central role of Grendel’s mother is implicit in her role as the second of
Beowulf’s three main monstrous foes; yet it might be argued that her struc-
tural significance is greater still: by focusing on a figure apparently ‘wronged’
by Beowulf, the poet again shows his characteristic sympathy for the victims,
and allows his audience a fresh perspective on the mighty deeds they witness.
The introduction of Grendel’s mother comes hard on the description of the
unsuspecting Danes and Geats asleep in Heorot (lines 1255b–1278).
That became clear, widely-known to men, that an avenger still lived after the hateful one, a long time after the war-strife. Grendel’s mother, an awesome assailant in woman’s form, called to mind her misery, she who had to inhabit the dread waters, the cold streams, since Cain became the sword-slayer to his only brother, his paternal kinsman: for that he went forth stained [or ‘guilty’], marked by murder, fleeing the joys of men, dwelt in the wilderness. From there arose many fatal spirits; Grendel was one, a hateful and fierce outcast, who found at Heorot a watchful man, waiting for battle. There the awesome assailant took hold of him, but he called to mind his mighty strength, the ample gift that God had given him, and trusted in the favour of the all-powerful, his comfort and support; thereby he laid low the hellish spirit. Then he went forth humiliated, deprived of joy, to seek a deadly abode, the enemy of mankind; and his mother still, ravenous and grimly determined wanted to go on a sorrowful trip, to avenge her son’s death.

It is not, of course, literally true that Grendel’s mother outlived her son ‘for a long time’ (lange þrage, line 1257b): even now, her days are numbered. But it is striking that in the earlier passage in the poem introducing Grendel and describing Cain and his descendants (lines 102–14), precisely the same phrase is used to describe the feud of the Titans against god (line 114a); nor is that the only verbal parallel between the passages (compare Panon . . . onwocon, line 111; Panon woc, line 1265b). Within this passage, the poet uses both rhyme and verbal echo to connect the fates of both Cain and Grendel: Cain ‘went forth

stained [or ‘guilty’], marked by murder, fleeing the joys of men, dwelt in the wilderness’ (he þa fag gewat / morþre gemearcod, mandream fleon, / westen warode, lines 1263b–1265a); Grendel ‘went forth humiliated, deprived of joy, to seek a deadly abode, the enemy of mankind’ (þa he hean gewat, dreame bedeale, deapwic seon, mancynnes feond, lines 1274b–1276a).94 Even the word gemearcod (‘marked’, line 1264a) used of Cain, calls to mind the description of Grendel as a mearcstapa (‘march-stepper’, line 103a; cf. line 1348a).95

Despite being identified as female three times in quick succession as soon as she is introduced (modor, ides, aglæcwif, lines 1258b–1259a), the first time a pronoun is used of Grendel’s mother it is grammatically masculine (line 1260a; cf. lines 1392b, 1394b; 1497b); Taylor’s suggestion that Beowulf’s own focus on Grendel largely leads to the confusion seems rather strained:96 although two of these references occur in a speech by Beowulf, the other two are used by the poet. Moreover, although it is true both that on a handful of other occasions the poet follows a grammatically feminine antecedent with a masculine pronoun (seo hand . . . se þe, lines 1343b–1344a; yldo . . . se þe, lines 1886b–1887b; sio hond . . . se ðe, lines 2684b–2685a), and that while the se þe construction occurs in Beowulf around fifty times, a parallel seo þe is found only once (line 1445a), the poet’s ambivalent depiction of Grendel’s mother seems confirmed by the implicitly masculine designation of her as a felasinnigne secg (line 1379a; cf. mihtig manscaða, line 1339a; gryrelicne grundhyrde, line 2136), The confusion is compounded further when Grendel’s mother is seen in action, and an explicit contrast is drawn between Grendel’s approach to Heorot and that of his mother (lines 1279–95).97

Grendel’s own nocturnal approach to Heorot is a masterful piece of suspenseful description (lines 702b–727):98

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94 Similarly, the description of Grendel as ‘deprived of joy’ (dreame bedeale, line 1275a) echoes that given earlier, when he is described as ‘deprived of joys’ (dreamum bedæled, line 721a).

95 The alliterative collocation mearc-//mor- is consistently applied in such contexts to Grendel and his kind (mearcstapa . . . moras, line 103; morþre gemearcod, line 1264a; mearcstapan . . . moras, line 1348; cf. myrcan mor, line 1405a). See further Sharma, ‘Movement and Space as Metaphor in Old English Poetry’, pp. 207–39.

96 Taylor, ‘Beowulf’s Second Grendel Fight’.


98 The manuscript reads syn scapa (‘sinful destroyer’) at line 707a, but the emendation has been generally accepted. This passage has been discussed many times; see particularly Brodeur, The Art of
Com on wanre niht
scriðan sceadugenga. Sceotend swæfon,
þa þæt hornreced healdan scoldon,
ealle buton anum. Þæt wæs yldum cuþ
þæt hie ne moste, þa metod nolde,
se scyansaþa under sceadu bregðan; –
ac he wæccende wraþum on andan
bad bolgenmod beadwa geþinges.
Ða com of more under misthleoþum
Grendel gongan, godes yrre bær;
mynte se manscaða manna cynnes
sumne besyrwan in sele þam hean.
Wod under wolcnum to þæs þe he winreced,
goldsele gumena, gearwost wisse,
fattum fahne. Ne wæs þæt forma sið
þæt he Hroþgares ham gesohte;
næfre he on aldordagum ær ne siþðan
heardran hæle, healðegnas fand!
Com þa to recede rinc siðian,
dreamum bedæled. Duru sona onarn,
fyrbendum fæst, syþðan he hire folmum æþran;
onbræd þa bealohydig, ða he gebolgen wæs,
recedes muþan. Raþe æfter þon
on fagne flor feond treddode,
eode yrremod; him of eagum stod
ligge gelicost leohr unfæger.

[Then there came in the dark night the shadow-walker stalking. The warriors slept, who ought to hold that gabled hall, all except one. It was known to men that the fiendish [or ‘sinful’] destroyer could not drag them under shadows against the Creator’s will; but he, vigilant, in malice against the foe, awaited with swollen heart the joining of battle. Then there came from the moor, under misty slopes, Grendel approaching: he bore God’s anger; the wicked destroyer intended to ensnare one of mankind in that high hall. He walked under clouds until he could most clearly perceive the wine-building, the gold-hall of men, adorned with plate. That was not the first time that he had sought out Hrothgar’s home; but never before nor afterwards in the days of his life did he come upon thegns in a hall with a harsher fate! Then there came travelling to that building the man deprived of joys. The door promptly sprang apart, secure with forged bands, when he touched it with his hands. The one intent on evil, since he was swollen with rage, tore open the building’s mouth. Swiftly after that, the fiend stepped onto the decorated floor, advanced angry in spirit; from his eyes there stood, most like a flame, an unlovely light.]
The celebrated threefold repetition of *com* (lines 702b, 710a, and 720a), inexorably focusing in on the hall as Grendel emerges from the shadows, however, is not unique to *Beowulf*: elsewhere in the same manuscript a similar technique is used to describe the advancing army of the Jews in *Judith* (*stopon . . . stopon . . . stopon*, lines 200b, 212b, and 227a). Grendel approaches Heorot in much the same manner as the night itself had come upon the feasting warriors (lines 649–51a):

> oðþe nipende niht ofer ealle,  
> scaduhelma gesceapu scriðan cwoman,  
> wan under wolcnum.  
> [Until the darkening night over all, the shape-concealing shadows came stalking, dark under the clouds.]

Unlike night itself, however, Grendel is depicted as a sentient being with plans of his own.99 Three times in the course of the fight itself we are told of Grendel’s intentions in identical terms (*mynte*, lines 712a, 731a, and 762a), and his eventual conflict with Beowulf is depicted as essentially a clash of wills (lines 750–61):100

> Sona þæt onfunde fyrena hyrde 750  
> þæt he ne mette middangeardes,  
> eorþan sceata, on elran men  
> mundgripe maran. He on mode wearð forht on ferhœ; no þy ær fram meahte.  
> Hyge wæs him hinfus, wolde on heolster fleon, 755  
> secan deofla gedræg; ne wæs his drohtoð þær  
> swylyce he on ealderdagum ær gemette.  
> Gemunde þa se modega, mæg Higelaces, æfenspræce, uplang astod  
> ond him fæste wiðfeng; fingras burston. 760  
> Eoten wæs utweard; eorl furþur stop.  
> [The master of wicked deeds immediately perceived that he had not met in the world, on the face of the earth a greater hand-grip on any other

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100 For the reading *modega* for manuscript *goda*, see Bliss, *Metre of *Beowulf**, pp. 16–17, and Kendall, *Metrical Grammar*, p. 78. Likewise, the manuscript reads *sceatta* at line 752a (through dittography?).
man; in his heart he was frightened in spirit, none the sooner could he get away. His mind was eager to escape: he wanted to flee into the darkness, to seek the company of devils; his plight there was not such as he had met before in the days of his life. The courageous kinsman of Hygelac called to mind what was said that evening; he stood upright, and grasped him firmly; fingers burst: the giant was for heading off, the warrior came on.]

This description, in many ways the climax of the fight itself, is carefully constructed both to draw a stark contrast between the thoughts and actions of the two combatants, and to echo earlier parts of the poem. Grendel’s thoughts and feelings are dealt with in a dense passage fairly stuffed with the vocabulary of mind and soul (onfunde . . . on mode . . . on ferhôe . . . Hyge, lines 750a, 753b, 754a and 755a), marked off in an envelope-pattern (mette . . . gemette, lines 751a and 757b); Beowulf’s initial thoughts are linked to those of Grendel in this passage through rhyme (onfunde . . . Gemunde, lines 750a and 758a), but after remembering the speeches of the evening he is all action, a factor underlined with adverbial force (uplang astod . . . fæste wiðfeng . . . furpur stop, lines 759a, 760a, and 761b, emphasis added). Grendel’s immediate perception that he had never in his life felt such a hand-grip confirms the earlier reports that Hrothgar says he has received concerning Beowulf’s powers (lines 377–81a), and also reflects the earlier foreboding words of the poet himself about Grendel’s ill-fated trip (lines 718–19):101

naefre he on aldordagum ær ne siþdan
heardran heale, healðegnas fand!
[Never before nor afterwards in the days of his life did he come upon thegns in a hall with a harsher fate!]

Given Grendel’s central role as a man-eating monster, it seems extraordinary that the Beowulf-poet should choose to depict him as a character with a point of view, one that is capable of evoking sympathy, at precisely this key moment in the battle, when the predator becomes prey. Sympathy might be more naturally forthcoming for Grendel’s mother, roused by grim circumstance to avenge her son. Her own approach to Heorot is rather less dramatic than her son’s (lines 1279–95):102

Com þa to Heorote, ðær Hringdene
geond þæt sæld swæfun. Þa ðær sona wearð
edhwyrft eorlum, siþdan inne fealh
Grendles modor. Wæs se gryre læssa
efne swa micle swa bið mægða cræft,
wiggryre wifes, be wæpnedmen,
þonne heoru bunden, hamere geþruen,
1280
sweedswate fah swin ofer helme
1285

101 For the translation, see Rosier, ‘What Grendel Found’.
102 The manuscript reads gepuren at line 1285b, but several editors (including Mitchell and Robinson, ed., Beowulf, p. 91) assume metathesis, on which see further above, pp. 43–5.
The speed of the description of this hit-and-run raid contrasts sharply with the leisurely account of Grendel’s own foray into Heorot: Grendel’s mother comes and goes in the space of seventeen lines; her son took more than 120 (lines 702b–823a). The difference in scale, aptly characterised here as the difference in ‘terror’ caused by the male and female creatures, is just that: the account of the attack by Grendel’s mother contains many echoes of that of her son, of which it is in effect a perfect miniature. Grendel’s own approach to Heorot is heralded by a threefold repetition of com (lines 702b, 710a, and 720a); that of his mother by a single occurrence of the same term (line 1279a). Grendel finds warriors sleeping (lines 728–30a); so does his mother (lines 1279b–1280a). When the alarm is raised about Grendel’s raid, the warriors awaken, arm themselves, and prepare to fight (lines 794b–805a); Grendel’s mother meets a similar reception (lines 1288–91). In the face of opposition, Grendel’s instinct is to flee (lines 755–764a), as is that of his mother (lines 1292–3). Other verbal echoes heighten the parallel. So, for example, the repetition within this passage of the term ‘terror’ itself (gryre, line 1282b; wiggryre, line 1284a) echoes previous usages that are all almost specific to Grendel’s own activities (gryre, lines 384a and 478a; gryra, line 591b; gryreleoð, line 786a; færgryrum, line 174a).103

Grendel’s mother makes off with Æschere, Hrothgar’s beloved thegn, snatched from his bed (on ræste abreat, / blædfæstne beorn, line 1298b–1299a; cf. anne hæfde / fæste befangen, þa heo to fenne gang, lines 1294b–1295) in a

103 Two other earlier usages seem to reflect the notion that Grendel’s ‘terror’ can only be combated by other ‘terror’ (gryrum, line 483b; gryregeatwum, line 324a); a similar usage follows with respect to Grendel’s mother (gryresiðas, line 1462a). Later references all relate to the dragon (gryrebroga, line 2227; gryregieste, line 2560a; gryrefahne, line 2576b; gryrefah, line 3041a), except for two, one of which refers to one of the creatures from the monster mere (gryrelicine, line 1441a), and another (albeit grammatically masculine) to Grendel’s mother herself (gryrelicine, line 2136a).
further scaling down of her son’s activities; in an earlier raid Grendel had snatched thirty men from their beds (on ræste genam / þritig þegna, lines 122b–123a). The poet’s subsequent observation that in this raid Grendel has left the remains of fifteen of these unfortunates in Heorot, and carried off the fifteen others for later consumption (lines 1580–4a) is particularly intriguing in the light of Anderson’s suggestion that the blood-spattered ‘well-known hand’ (cuþe folme, line 1303a) seized by Grendel’s mother is not that of her son (as is usually thought), but that of Æschere, so promoting the feud by grim retaliation.\(^{104}\) The poet’s observation that ‘grief was renewed’ (cearo wæs geniwod, line 1303b) is echoed by Hrothgar’s own immediate reaction that ‘sorrow is renewed’ (sorh is geniwod, line 1322b), and in any case the poet continues with a ringing condemnation of the nature of the vendetta (lines 1304b–1306a):\(^{105}\)

\[
\text{Ne wæs þæt gewrixle til,} \\
\text{þæt hie on ba healfa bicgan scoldon} \\
freonda feorum. \\
\text{[That was not a good exchange, that they on both sides had to pay with the lives of their friends.]}
\]

In fact, since the Geats and Danes later find Æschere’s head by the monster-mere (line 1421b),\(^{106}\) it is clear that Grendel’s mother carried of more of her prey than just the arm, but the poet’s use of the term cuþe folme here is but the first of a string of terms in close proximity based on words for ‘arm’ (earm), ‘hand’ (hand), or ‘shoulder’ (eaxl): Beowulf’s troop are described as a handscale (line 1317a), Æschere as an eaxlgestealla (line 1325a), whose hand (1343b) now lies dead, Grendel’s mother as a handbana (line 1330b); even Grendel, in a play on the two meanings of the word earm (‘arm’ and ‘wretched’) is described as earsmceapen (line 1351b).\(^{107}\)

This last term occurs in the middles of Hrothgar’s chilling description of the monster-mere (lines 1345–57a):

\[
\text{‘Ic þæt londbuen, leode mine,} \\
\text{selerædende, segan hyrde} \\
\text{þæt hie gesawon swylce twegen} \\
micle mearcstapan moras healdan, \\
ellorgæstas. Ðæra oðer wæs,} \\
\text{þæs þe hie gewislicost gewitan meahton,} \\
\text{idese onlicnæs; oðer earsmceapen} \\
on weres wæstmum wræclastas træd, \\
næfne he wæs mara þonne ænig man oðer;} \\
\text{þone on geardagum Grendel nemdon} \\
foldbuende. No hie ðæder cunnon,}
\]

\(^{104}\) Anderson, ‘The cuþe folme in Beowulf’.

\(^{105}\) It may be worth noting that in the only other similar occurrence of the phrase in Beowulf, it is the ‘lives of enemies’ (freonda feorum, line 1152a) rather than of friends, which is stressed.

\(^{106}\) For the relevant scene, see above, pp. 82–3.

\(^{107}\) See further Rosier, ‘The Uses of Association’ and above, p. 182.
hwæþer him ænig wæs ær acenned
dyrnra gasta.’

[‘I have heard the locals, my people, hall-counsellors, tell that they saw two such mighty wanderers in the wastes inhabit the moors, alien spirits, of whom one was, so far as they could most easily tell, the semblance of a woman. The other wretched one whom, in past days, dwellers in the land named Grendel, trod exile-paths in human form, except that he was greater than any other man. They did not know of any father, whether any such had been begotten of secret spirits.’]

The reference to ‘hall-counsellors’ (selerædende, line 1346a) is potentially loaded, since at the beginning of the poem (line 51b) it is their lack of knowledge of the ultimate destination of Scyld Scefing that is stressed. A further echo again aligns Grendel with his slayer: Hrothgar says of Grendel that ‘he was greater than any other man’ (he wæs mara þonne ænig man oðer, line 1353), whilst the Danish coastwarden had said of Beowulf that he had ‘never seen a greater warrior in the world’ (naefre ic maran geseah eorla ofer eorþan, lines 247b–248a). The alignment of Grendel and his kin with ‘secret spirits’ (dyrnra gasta, line 1357a) is surely revealing: Grendel’s crime was precisely to make his secret presence felt (undyrne, line 127b; undyrne cuð, lines 150b and 410b).

There follows Hrothgar’s celebrated description of the monster-mere, Beowulf’s clumsy attempt to comfort the aged Dane, and an account of the arming of the hero. Just before Beowulf plunges into the mere, he utters another of his formal boasts: he will gain glory with Hrunting, or die in the attempt (ic mid Hruntinge / dom gewyrce opðe mec deað nimeð, lines 1490b–1491). Once again, however, the mask of Beowulf’s perfection slips: neither of the possibilities he outlines actually occurs. Just before these words, Beowulf had explicitly acknowledged the strength of his new relationship with Hrothgar, who had earlier made Beowulf, in effect, his son (lines 946b–949a); Beowulf’s response here is equally unambiguous, an acceptance of his new position (lines 1477–9):

‘gif ic æt þearfe þinre scolde
aldre linnan, þæt ðu me a wære
forðgewitenum on ðæter stæle.’

[‘[Remember] if for your sake I had to lose my life, that you have always been in a father’s place to the one who is dead.’]

Having addressed his speech to Hrothgar, Beowulf plunges into the mere, diving down for an indeterminate time. In a surely conscious echo of Grendel’s own
thoughts in the earlier battle (*Sona þæt onfunde*, line 750a), we are told that when Beowulf could see the bottom, Grendel’s mother ‘immediately perceived it’ (*Sona þæt onfunde*, line 1497a); likewise we learn that Grendel’s mother, like Hrothgar before Grendel’s first attack, like Beowulf himself before that of the dragon, had governed her domain for fifty years. Just as in Beowulf’s earlier battle with Grendel, so too in the case of Grendel’s mother we are told much of the perceptions of the individual participants. So, at the start of their conflict, Grendel’s mother ‘perceived’ and ‘beheld’ (*onfunde . . . beheold*, lines 1497a and 1498a) her foe, whilst Beowulf ‘noticed’, ‘saw’, ‘noticed’, and ‘perceived’ his amazing surroundings (*ongeat . . . geseah . . . ongheat . . . onfand*, lines 1512b, 1516b, 1518a, and 1522b). Moreover, just as Beowulf’s men had ineffec-
tually attempted to pierce Grendel’s impervious skin with their weapons (lines 794b–805a), so too do the minor inhabitants attempt to pierce Beowulf’s impervious mailcoat (lines 1501–17):115

Grap þa togeanes,  guððinc gefeng
atolan clommum.  No þy ær in gescod
halan lice;  hring utan ymbbearh,
þæt heo þone fyrdhom  þurhfon ne mihte,
locene leoðosycan  laþan fingrum.
  1505
Beær þa seo brimwylf,  þa heo to botme com,
hringa þengel  to hofe sinum,
swa he ne mihte,  no he þæs modig wæs,
wæpna gewealdan,  ac hine wundra þæs fela
swencte on sunde,  sædeor monig
hildetuxum  heresyrcan bræc,
ehton aglácan.  Da se eorl ongeat
þæt he in niðsele  nathwylcum wæs,
þær him nænig wæter  wihte ne sceþede,
ne him for hrofsele  hrinan ne mehte
færgripe flodes;  fyrléoht geseah,
blacne leoman,  beorhtet scinan.
  1510
[Then she made a grasp towards him, seized the warrior with her dread claws; yet she did not injure his unharmed body; the rings protected him without, so that she could not penetrate the battle-coat, the linked mail-shirt, with hostile fingers. When she came to the bottom the sea-wolf carried the prince of rings to her home, so that he could not, however brave he was, wield weapons, but a host of strange creatures oppressed him in the swell, many a sea-beast struck his war-shirt with their battle-tusks, pursued the awesome assailant (or ‘awesome assail-
ants pursued [him]’). Then the warrior perceived that he was in some kind of hostile hall, where no water could cause him any harm, nor could the sudden grip of the flood touch him; he saw fire-light, a gleaming beam, shining brightly.]

115 The manuscript reads *brim wyl* at 1506a, *þæm* at line 1508b, and *swecte* at line 1510a; *in* does not appear in the manuscript at 1513a. All of the proposed emendations are straightforward and generally accepted by most editors.
The parallel between Grendel’s attack on Heorot, and Beowulf’s attack on the ‘hall’ (niðsele, line 1513a; hrofsele, line 1515a) of Grendel’s mother, complete with the homely touch of fire-light, surely makes it most likely that he (rather than the sea-beasts) is the aglæcan referred to in line 1512. At this point, Beowulf attempts to bring Hrunting into play, striking Grendel’s mother on the head, but the previously trusty weapon is simply not up to the task (lines 1522b–1528):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Da se gist onfand} & \\
\text{þæt se beadoleoma} & \text{ bitan nolde,} \\
\text{alдре sceþðan} & \text{ ac seo ecg geswac} \\
\text{ðæodne æt þærfe;} & \text{ ðolode ær fela} \\
\text{hondgemota,} & \text{ helm oft gescær,} \\
\text{fæges fyrdhægl;} & \text{ ða wæs forma sið} \\
\text{deorum madme,} & \text{ þæt his dom alæg.}
\end{align*}
\]

[Then the guest discovered that the battle-beam would not bite, harm the life, but the edge failed the prince in his need; previously it had endured many hand-to-hand encounters, often sliced a helmet, the battle-corselet of the doomed; that was the first time for the precious treasure, that its glory faltered.]

That Beowulf is described as a ‘guest’ (gist, line 1422b; cf. selegyst, line 1545a) in this hall, just like Grendel had been in Heorot, only underlines the parallel, whilst the fact that Beowulf is unable to penetrate the skin of Grendel’s mother and ‘harm life’ (aldre sceþðan, line 1524a) only echoes the impervious nature both of Grendel in Heorot, and of Beowulf’s own mailcoat, which he dons explicitly so that nothing can penetrate and ‘harm life’ (aldre gesceþðan, line 1447b). Moreover, the words used to describe Hrunting’s failure are very close to those which had been used to extol the weapon earlier (lines 1460b–1464):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{næfre hit æt hilde ne swac} & \\
\text{manna ængum} & \text{ þara þe hit mid mundum bewand,} \\
\text{se ðe gryresiðas} & \text{ gegan dorste,} \\
\text{folcstede fara;} & \text{ næs þæt forma sið} \\
\text{þæt hit ellenweorc} & \text{ æfnan scolde.}
\end{align*}
\]

[It had never failed in battle any man who grasped it in his hand, who entered on dangerous deeds, the meeting-place of foes; that was not the first time that it had to perform a courageous deed.]

As Beowulf resorts first to hand-to-hand combat, then to the use of ‘an ancient giant sword’ (ealdsweord eotenisc, line 1558a), the actual mechanics of the combat are almost as oblique as in his battle against Grendel. First he grasps Grendel’s mother by the hair (or perhaps shoulder), and makes her fall towards the floor (þæt heo on flet gebeah, line 1540); next, couched in the same syntactic format, he trips (þæt he on fylle wearð, line 1544b). What happens

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116 On the use of the term, see above, pp. 90 and 189.
next is unclear: it has usually been understood that Grendel’s mother sits astride her foe, brandishing her knife (Ofsæt þa þone selegyst ond hyre seax geteah, line 1545), so spawning a whole series of comments on the supposed psycho-sexual imagery of the scene, but Fred Robinson has recently suggested that the correct sense of ofsittan is no more than ‘set upon’ (rather than ‘sit upon’). Nonetheless, from this apparently desperate situation, Beowulf apparently recovers, helped, the poet tells us, by his mail-shirt and by God (in that order, lines 1547b–1556).

Beowulf’s salvation comes in the shape of a monstrous sword (lines 1557–69):

Geseah ða on searwum sigeeadig bil, eald sword eotenisc, ecgum þyhtig, wigena weorðmund; þæt wæs væpna cyst, buton hit wæs mare ðonne ænig mon oðer to beadulace ætberan meahte, god ond geatolic, giganta geweorc. He gefeng þa fetelhilt, freca Scyldinga hreoh ond heorogrím hringmæl gebrægd, aldres orwena, yrringa sloh, 1560
þæt hire wið halse heard grapode, banhringas bræc. Bil eal ðurhwod fægne flæschoman; heo on flet gecrong. Sword wæs swatig, secg weorce gefeh.

[He saw among the accoutrements a victory-blessed weapon, an ancient sword made by giants, strong in edge, a glory for warriors; it was the best of weapons, except that it was greater than any other man might carry to the play of battle, fine and splendid, the work of titans. The warrior of the Scyldings, fierce and deadly grim, drew the ring-patterned sword, without hope of his life, struck angrily, so that it caught her hard on the neck, broke the ring of bone. The sword passed right through the doomed body; she fell to the floor. The sword was bloody; the man rejoiced in his deed.]

This climactic scene is rich with meaning and allusion. The sword on the wall, one of many armaments, reminds us that the hall of Grendel’s mother, like Heorot, is decked with weapons. The fact that ‘it was greater than any other man might carry to the play of battle’ (hit wæs mare ðonne ænig mon oðer to beadulace ætberan meahte, lines 1560–1) might suggest that it was Grendel’s own weapon, since ‘he was greater than any other man’ (he wæs mara þonne ænig mon oðer, line 1353), except that we are told that he did not use a sword; at all events, it is a fit weapon for Beowulf too, of whom the Danish coastwarden had said in strikingly parallel terms that he had ‘never seen a greater warrior in

118 See, for example, Chance, ‘The Structural Unity in Beowulf’, pp. 253–5.
120 The word wæs does not appear in the manuscript at line 1559b, having presumably been omitted through eye-skip to væpna, but it is easily supplied on the basis of parallel formulas in line 1232b.
the world’ (*næfre ic maran geseah eorla ofer eorþan*, lines 247b–248a). Certainly, if the sword is ‘fine and splendid’ (*god ond geatolic*, line 1562), then Beowulf himself is ‘fierce and battle-grim’ (*hreoh ond heorogrim*, line 1564a). Such a weapon would clearly have been beyond Unferð, although it is stressed that this sword, like Hrunting, is ‘ring-patterned’ (*hringmæl*, lines 1521b and 1564b). Unlike the rather leisurely account of the fight with Grendel, however, once Beowulf swings the sword, the movement is rapid, as we alternate swiftly between Beowulf’s actions and those of the sword (*gefeng . . . gebraegd . . . sloh . . . grapode . . . braeac . . . durhwoed*, lines 1563a–1566b) and then between the sword and Grendel’s mother, and the sword and Beowulf (*Bil . . . heo . . . Sweord . . . secg*, lines 1567b–1569).

Immediately following the decapitation of Grendel’s mother, the poet introduces a chiastic description of light flooding the hall (*Lixte se leoma, leocht inne stod*, line 1570), just as light shines after several of the monster-slayings. In the same spirit of anger that has characterised this and others of his undertakings (*gebolgen*, line 1539b; *yrringa*, line 1565b; *yrre*, line 1575a, *reþe*, line 1585a), Beowulf turns to the recumbent form of Grendel, as the poet reminds us of Grendel’s terrible crimes (lines 1584b–1590):

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He him þæs lean forgeald,
reþe cempa, to ðæs þe he on ræste geseah 1585
guðwerigne Grendel liegan
aldorleasne, swa him ær gescod
hild æt Heorote. Hra wide sprong,
syþðan he æfter deaðe drepe þrowade,
drepe prowade,
heorosweng hearndene, ond hine þa heafde becearf. 1590
```

[He gave him his reward for that, the fierce champion, when he saw on the bed Grendel lying, battle-weary, lifeless, just as battle had damaged him at Heorot. The body burst open once he suffered a blow after death, a hard sword-stroke, as he cut off his head.]

The words used to describe Beowulf’s revenge exactly echo those used of God’s own conflict against the race of monster (*he him ðæs lean forgeald*, line 114b). Moreover, just as both Grendel and his mother had burst gloating into Heorot to attack sleeping warriors in their beds (*on ræste*, lines 122b, 747a, and 1298b), so now he is attacked in his bed; the poet’s description of Grendel as ‘battle-weary’ (*guðwerigne*, line 1586a) momentarily sustains the illusion that he is merely asleep, a connection between sleep and death that occurs numerous times in the text.

The immediate result of the beheading of Grendel is to cause consternation amongst those waiting above (lines 1591–1605a):

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121 On this repeated motif of anger, cf. Henry, ‘*Furor heroicus*’.
122 See further above, p. 167.
123 Cf. Beowulf’s description of Grendel as *fylwerigne* (line 962b).
124 The manuscript reads *abreoten* at line 1599b and *secan* at line 1602b, but the emendations adopted here are commonplace; for the *c/t*-confusion implied in line 1602b, for example, see above, pp. 42 and 45.
Sona þæt gesawon snottre ceorlas,
þa ðe midd Hröðgare on holm wilton,
þæt wæs yðgeblond eal gemenged,
brim blode fah. Blondenfeaxe,
gomele ymb godne, ongeador spræcon
þæt hig þæs æðelinges eft ne wendon
þæt he sigehreðig secean come
mærne þeoden; þa ðæs monige gewearð
þæt hine seo brimwylf ðabroten hæfde.
Da com non dæges. Næs ofgeafon
hwate Scyldingas; gewat him ham þonon
goldwine gumena. Gistas setan
modes seoce ond on mere staredon,
wiston ond ne wendon þæt hie heora winedrihten
selfne gesawon.

[Immediately the wise men, who gazed with Hrothgar into the water,
saw that the surging waves were all disturbed, the swell stained with
blood. The grey-haired old men spoke together about the good man, that
they did not expect the prince, that he should come exulting in victory to
seek the famous prince; many reckoned that the sea-wolf had destroyed
him. Then came the ninth hour of the day, the bold Scyldings left the
headland; the gold-friend of men went home from there. The strangers
sat down, sick at heart, and stared into the mere; they wished but did not
expect to see their lord and friend himself.]

The passage is delimited by an envelope pattern (gesawon ... gesawon, lines 1591a–1605a), and concludes with a series of lines and half-lines which end in
unstressed syllables in -n: (ofgeafon ... þonon ... setan ... staredon ... wendon ... winedrihten ... gesawon, lines 1600–5). Other verbal effects
include paronomasia (geblond ... blondenfeaxe, lines 1593a and 1594b) and the
pointed use of formulaic epithets in inappropriate circumstances: elsewhere in
the poem there are ‘wise men’ (snottre ceorlas, lines 202b and 416b; cf. snotor ceorl, line 908b), but nowhere else do they assess the situation so unwisely; like-
wise, elsewhere the Danes are called ‘bold’ (hwate Scyldingas, lines 2052b and
3005b), when they are perhaps acting more heroically than their summary
withdrawal here might suggest. The description of the waters of the mere
mingled with blood (yðgeblond eal gemenged, brim blode fah, lines 1593–4a) is,
in effect, an echo of the earlier sight of the mere suffused with Grendel’s blood,
when Beowulf and the Danes had first gone to view it before the advent of
Grendel’s mother (on blode brim weallende, atol yða geswing eal gemenged,
haton heolfre, heorodmore weol, lines 847–9).125

Having offered us a glimpse of what is happening on the surface, the poet
turns back to the hall beneath the mere (lines 1605b–17):127

125 On this repeated line, see pp. 90, 242, and 255.
127 For further discussion of the motif of the melting sword, see, for example, above, p. 140.
Then that sword, because of the combat-blood, the war-blade began to waste away in battle-icicles. It was a wonder, that it entirely melted, most like ice, when the Father releases the bonds of frost, unwinds the water-fetters, he who has control over times and seasons: that is the true Creator. The warrior of the Weather-Geats did not take from that dwelling any other precious objects, even though he saw many there, except for the head and the hilt as well, adorned with treasure. The sword had melted away, the patterned blade burned up; the blood was so hot, the venomous alien spirit, who had died inside.

Once again, the passage is delimited by both an envelope pattern (gemealt . . . gemealt, lines 1608a–1615b) and end-rhyme (gemealt . . . swealt, lines 1615b and 1617b); other aural effects decorate the text (wel-/ sæl-/ mel-, lines 1610–11). Similarly careful patterned repetition marks out Beowulf’s subsequent activities: as he dives up through the waters they are as cleansed as they had previously been disturbed (wæron yðgebland eal gefælsod, line 1620; cf. þæt wæs yðgeblond eal gemenged, line 1593), whilst the movements of Beowulf and his men towards Heorot are every bit as carefully choreographed as those of Grendel had been (com . . . eodon . . . ferdon . . . comon . . . com, lines 1623a, 1626a, 1632a, 1640b, and 1644a).128

In this way, the Beowulf-poet bring the episodes of Grendel and his mother to a close, ending, as it had begun, with an approach to Heorot from across the fens. Likewise, the second of the two main sequences of action that characterise the first part of the poem comes to a conclusion, leaving the characters themselves to consider the significance of the deeds that have been done. And just as the fight against Grendel arose out of boasting words, and was followed by the celebration and contemplation of the Finnsburh-episode,129 so too the fight with Grendel’s mother arose out of words and is followed by a lengthy period of speech and contemplation.130 If the heroic deeds in Beowulf are presented for the ultimate consideration of the Beowulf-poet’s own audience, including

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128 Cf. above, pp. 78–9.
129 On which, see above, pp. 173–87.
130 On which, see above, pp. 158–62.
ourselves, the immediate reactions of the characters in the poem, voiced in speech, play a vital role in providing an extra perspective on all of the mighty deeds we witness. It is therefore to a close analysis of the many speeches in *Beowulf* that we now turn.
Words and Deeds

All talk and no action: the speeches in ‘Beowulf’

For a poem in which action is often held to play a major role, there is an inordinate amount of talk in Beowulf; over 1200 lines (some 38%) of the poem are taken up with around forty separate speeches.1 The speeches are largely confined to the major named characters;2 Beowulf, Hrothgar, and Wiglaf together utter more than three-quarters of the lines spoken in the text. But it is also important to realise that not all of the major named characters speak (Grendel is an obvious exception, but Hygelac’s own speaking-role is minimal), and indeed significant speeches are also accorded to unnamed characters, notably the coastwarden (lines 316–19, 286b–300, and 237–57), the so-called ‘Last Survivor’ (lines 2247–66), and, most chillingly, the anonymous messenger who foretells the doom of the Geats (lines 2900–3027). It is perhaps no surprise that Beowulf himself is by some way the most wordy character in the poem, breaking into speech on nineteen different occasions in addresses varying in length from a mere four lines (lines 316–19 and 2813–16) to an effusive 152 (lines 2000–151). The latter speech, the longest in the poem, in which Beowulf recounts his deeds in Denmark and makes a judicious prediction of the trouble in store for Ingeld and his bride,3 follows, by contrast, the brief welcoming utterance of Hygelac that constitutes his only speech in the entire poem.4 Hygelac’s speech, for its very singularity, deserves special attention (lines 1983b–1998):5

Higelac ongan
sinne geseldan in sele þam hean
fægre fricgcean hyne fyrwet bræc,

1985

1 See Table IV below, pp. 206–7; for similar tables, see, for example, McConchie, ‘The Use of the Verb mapelian in Beowulf’, pp. 66–7; Parker, ‘Beowulf’ and Christianity, pp. 187–8 (which, however, contains a number of factual errors). Significant studies of the speeches in Beowulf are to be found in, for example, Baker, ‘Beowulf as Orator’; Bjork, ‘Speech as Gift’; Levine, ‘Direct Discourse in Beowulf: its Meaning and Function’; Shaw, ‘The Speeches in Beowulf’; Shippey, ‘Principles of Conversation’; Silber, ‘Rhetoric as Prowess’. See too Andersson, ‘The Speeches in the Waldhere-Fragments’.

2 On which see above, pp. 169–73.

3 On Hygelac’s pivotal role in the poem as a whole, see, for example, Fast, ‘Hygelac: a Centripetal Force in Beowulf’; Malone, ‘Hygelac’; McNamara, ‘Beowulf and Hygelac’.

4 The manuscript reads wið cuðne at line 1991a, either through dittography or ð/id-confusion. See above, pp. 42–6.
Hygelac began decorously to question his companion in that high hall; he felt curious as to how the voyaging of the Sea-Geats had been: ‘How did it go for you on your trip, dear Beowulf, after you suddenly decided to seek out a distant conflict over the salt-water, battle at Heorot? Did you in any way remedy Hrothgar’s well-known woe? I seethed with surgings of sorrow for this heart-affliction, in no way had confidence in the journey of a dear man. For a long time I asked you in no way to meet this murderous spirit [or ‘stranger’], but to let the South-Danes themselves pick a fight with Grendel. I thank god that I can see you safe.’

Effectively, the burden of Hygelac’s speech is delivered in the very first clipped half-line: ‘How did it go for you on your trip? (Hu lomp eow on lade?, line 1987a); all the rest is gloss. Quite apart from the fact that Hygelac here appears to challenge both the poet and Beowulf himself (lines 202–4 and lines 415–18) in asserting that he attempted to dissuade Beowulf from his trip,6 there is an important implication in Hygelac’s claim on the one hand to have asked Beowulf not to go ‘for a long time’ (lange, line 1994b) and his insistence that Beowulf left ‘suddenly’ (færinga, line 1988a); indeed the description offered here of a rash adventure overseas would seem better to fit the poet’s assessment of Hygelac’s own final enterprise.7 Likewise, even this brief speech, which echoes in its introduction the initial questioning Beowulf faces in Denmark from the coastwarden (compare hine fyrwyt bræc, line 232b, with hyne fyrwet bræc, line 1985b; mepelwordum fregn, line 236b, with fægre fricgcean, line 1985a) and Wulfgar (compare frægn, line 332b, with fægre fricgcean, line 1985a), is carefully crafted. There seems, for example, deliberate patterning in the pronouns: after a cursory enquiry about both Beowulf and his men (eow, line 1987a, is plural), the questioning focuses on Beowulf himself (ðu . . . ðu), and in his self-commentary on the questions left hanging in the air, Hygelac makes it clear that this is very much a personal matter between Beowulf and himself (Ic . . . ic ðe . . . ðu . . . ic . . . ic ðe, lines 1992b–1998a). The speech ends, like many

6 One notes that on both occasions the poet stresses that it was ‘wise men’ (snotere ceorlas, lines 202b and 416b) who encouraged Beowulf to go to Denmark; is the poet here implying (as elsewhere) that wisdom is not necessarily a defining characteristic of Hygelac?

7 See above, pp. 98–9.
in the poem, with a series of words sharing alliteration both across and within lines (Suðđene sylfe...secge...gesundne geseon, lines 1996–8). Such careful arrangement of words suggests that, for the Beowulf-poet, the speeches were an important part of his story, and that their disposition within the text itself casts light on the poet’s intentions.

Table IV below provides an overview of all the speech-acts in Beowulf, analysed according to a number of different features such as audience, length, and setting. A number of clear patterns emerge. Most notable is the dramatic difference between Part I of the poem, describing Beowulf’s youthful exploits in Denmark (lines 1–2199), and Part II, describing his battle in old age in Geatland against the dragon (lines 2200–3182). Of the thirty speeches in Part I of the poem, all but five (nos. 4, 17, 20, 21, and 24) are part of decorously patterned exchanges in which two speakers talk in turn, and, uniquely in the special circumstances of Beowulf’s approach to Heorot, the first speaker is granted a final word. Only one of the thirty speeches is interrupted (no. 30), when Beowulf breaks off from his report to Hygelac to have gifts brought in. In Part II, by contrast, not a single one of the nine speeches is answered, and no fewer than three (nos. 32, 36, and 39) are interrupted. No more striking indication of the difference in tone between Parts I and II of the poem could be given, and such a contrast throws into sharp relief the few instances where speeches in Part I go unanswered. Two of these cases (nos. 17 and 24) comprise the formal boasts made by Beowulf before his battles with Grendel and Grendel’s mother respectively, to which no reply would surely be appropriate; extended periods of action (with no speeches at all) follow both. A third instance of unanswered speech in Part I is the brief farewell offered by the coastwarden after he has escorted Beowulf and his men to Heorot, and is returning to his post (no. 4, lines 316–19); again, the casual nature of the speech (the joint shortest in the entire poem) scarcely warrants a reply. In sharp contrast to these three examples of unanswered speech in Part I, it is surely significant that the only two speeches of Wealhtheow (nos. 20 and 21) in the poem, both articulating her concern for her sons’ futures, and addressed to Hrothgar and Beowulf, should both meet with a resounding silence.

In the face of such evidence of the artful disposition of speeches in the poem, one might well investigate the relationship between words and deeds in Beowulf by considering the patterning of the speeches themselves, concentrating on the carefully choreographed and decorous series of exchanges that take place between Beowulf’s arrival in Denmark and his welcome by Hrothgar in Heorot,

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8 On the artful use of alliteration in the poem, see above, pp. 61–9.
9 See further, for example, Klaeber, ed., Beowulf, p. lvi; Rauer, Beowulf and the Dragon, pp. 36–7.
10 See further below, pp. 208–18.
11 See further above, pp. 227–37.
12 On the function of the formal boast, see, for example, Conquergood, ‘Boasting in Anglo-Saxon England: Performance and the Heroic Ethos’; Einarsson, ‘Old English Beot and Old Icelandic Heitstrenging’; Nolan and Bloomfield, ‘Beotword, gilpcwidas, and the gilphlædan Scop of Beowulf’.
13 Only Beowulf’s own last words (lines 2813–16) are as brief. Frank, ‘Skaldic Verse and the Date of Beowulf’, p. 132, argues that the opening words of the coastwarden’s speech (which constitute a metrically unusual half-line) provide ‘a kind of pagan Norse colouring’.
14 See further below, pp. 219–22.
### Table IV: Speech-acts in *Beowulf*

**PART I (lines 1–2199)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Addressee</th>
<th>Extent</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Introductory Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>237–57</td>
<td>coastguard</td>
<td>Geats</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Danish coast</td>
<td>Beowulf’s arrival in Denmark</td>
<td><em>meþelwordum frægn</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>260–85</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>coastguard</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Danish coast</td>
<td>Beowulf’s arrival in Denmark</td>
<td><em>andswarode . . . wordhord onleac</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>287b–300</td>
<td>coastguard</td>
<td>Geats</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>Danish coast</td>
<td>Beowulf’s arrival in Denmark</td>
<td><em>maþelode</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>316–19</td>
<td>coastguard</td>
<td>Geats</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>outside Heorot</td>
<td>Beowulf’s arrival in Denmark</td>
<td><em>word . . . cwæþ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>333–9</td>
<td>Wulfgar</td>
<td>Geats</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>outside Heorot</td>
<td>Beowulf’s arrival at Heorot</td>
<td><em>frægn</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>342b–347</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Wulfgar</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>outside Heorot</td>
<td>Beowulf’s arrival at Heorot</td>
<td><em>andswarode . . . word . . . spræc</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>350b–355</td>
<td>Wulfgar</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>outside Heorot</td>
<td>Beowulf’s arrival at Heorot</td>
<td><em>maþelode</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>361–70</td>
<td>Wulfgar</td>
<td>Hrothgar</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>inside Heorot</td>
<td>Beowulf announced at Heorot</td>
<td><em>maþelode</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>372–389a</td>
<td>Hrothgar</td>
<td>Wulfgar</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>inside Heorot</td>
<td>Beowulf announced at Heorot</td>
<td><em>maþelode</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>391–8</td>
<td>Wulfgar</td>
<td>Geats</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>outside Heorot</td>
<td>Beowulf announced at Heorot</td>
<td><em>word . . . abead</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>407–55</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Hrothgar</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>inside Heorot</td>
<td>Beowulf welcomed at Heorot</td>
<td><em>maþelode</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>457–90</td>
<td>Hrothgar</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>inside Heorot</td>
<td>Beowulf welcomed at Heorot</td>
<td><em>maþelode</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>506–28</td>
<td>Unferth</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>inside Heorot</td>
<td>welcoming banquet at Heorot</td>
<td><em>maþelode</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>530–606</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Unferth</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>inside Heorot</td>
<td>welcoming banquet at Heorot</td>
<td><em>maþelode</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>632–8</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Danes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>inside Heorot</td>
<td>welcoming banquet at Heorot</td>
<td><em>gegrette . . . word acwæþ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>655–61</td>
<td>Hrothgar</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>inside Heorot</td>
<td>welcoming banquet at Heorot</td>
<td><em>maþelode</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>677–87</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>The company</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>inside Heorot</td>
<td>Beowulf’s boast</td>
<td><em>gespræc . . . gylpworda sum</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>928–56</td>
<td>Hrothgar</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>outside Heorot</td>
<td>examining Grendel’s torn-off arm</td>
<td><em>maþelode</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>958–79</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Hrothgar</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>outside Heorot</td>
<td>examining Grendel’s torn-off arm</td>
<td><em>maþelode</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1169–87</td>
<td>Wealhtheow</td>
<td>Hrothgar</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>inside Heorot</td>
<td>celebration after Grendel’s death</td>
<td><em>spræc</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>1216–31</td>
<td>Wealhtheow</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>inside Heorot</td>
<td>celebration after Grendel’s death</td>
<td><em>maþelode . . . spræc</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### PART II (lines 2200–3182)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Addressee</th>
<th>Extent</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Introductory Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>2247–66</td>
<td>Last survivor</td>
<td>the earth</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>inside the barrow</td>
<td>lay of the last survivor</td>
<td>fea worda cwæp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>2426–509</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Beowulf’s men</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>Outside the barrow</td>
<td>Beowulf’s boast</td>
<td>mapelode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>2511b–2515</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Beowulf’s men</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Outside the barrow</td>
<td>Beowulf’s boast</td>
<td>mapelode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>2518b–2537</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Beowulf’s men</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>Outside the barrow</td>
<td>Beowulf’s boast</td>
<td>gegrette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>2633–60</td>
<td>Wiglaf</td>
<td>Beowulf’s men</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>outside the barrow</td>
<td>Wiglaf joins the fray</td>
<td>mapelode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>2663–8</td>
<td>Wiglaf</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>outside the barrow</td>
<td>Wiglaf joins the fray</td>
<td>fea worda cwæp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>2729–51</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Wiglaf</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>outside the barrow</td>
<td>Beowulf’s last words</td>
<td>mapelode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>2794–808</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Wiglaf?</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>outside the barrow</td>
<td>Beowulf’s last words</td>
<td>*spræc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>2813–16</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
<td>Wiglaf</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>outside the barrow</td>
<td>Beowulf’s last words</td>
<td>het</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>2864–91</td>
<td>Wiglaf</td>
<td>Beowulf’s men</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>outside the barrow</td>
<td>Wiglaf’s reproach</td>
<td>mapelode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>2900–3027</td>
<td>messenger</td>
<td>Geatish people</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>inside Geats’ stronghold</td>
<td>messenger’s prophecy</td>
<td>sægde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>3077–109</td>
<td>Wiglaf</td>
<td>Geatish people</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>outside the barrow</td>
<td>funeral preparations</td>
<td>mapelode</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
together with the equally well-managed pair of speeches that signal Beowulf’s departure from Heorot, before focusing attention on a string of instances where speech fails (notably in the series of unanswered speeches that characterises Wealhtheow’s utterances) or (as in the case of the dragon-fight) action intervenes.

Talking it up: Beowulf’s arrival in and departure from Denmark

Almost as soon as he disembarks, Beowulf and his men encounter the Danish coastwarden, who gives the first of the many speeches in the poem. Although Beowulf reaches Denmark in line 229, he does not actually address Hrothgar, the Danish king, until almost 200 lines later (line 407). In the interim, there are no fewer than ten separate speeches, carefully choreographed in an elaborate pattern which establishes the Danish court as a sophisticated and mannered milieu, where particular customs prevail. Beowulf establishes himself as fully in command of the appropriate usages, and indeed begins to demonstrate the considerable verbal dexterity that characterises his utterances in the poem.

Apart from the initial exchange with the coastwarden, all the speeches (with the exception of that of the wordy Hrothgar) in this sequence are relatively short. There is much careful repetition, particularly in the initial exchanges that both the coastwarden and Wulfgar have with the Geats. In each case, the Dane in question asks who the newcomers are (Hwæt syndon ge searohabbendra, line 237; Hwanon eowre cyme syndon, line 257b; Hwanon ferigeað ge fætte scyldas, line 333), states his own role (Ic hwile wæs endesæta, lines 240b–241a; Ic eom Hroðgares ar ond ombiht, lines 335b–336a), and expresses admiration for the travellers (No her cuðlicor cuman ongunnon lindhæbbende, lines 244–5a; Ne geseah ic elþeodige þus manige men modiglicran, lines 336b–7); in each case, Beowulf answers on behalf of the Geats in substantially the same terms, identifying them as Hygelac’s retainers (We synt gumcynnes Geata leode ond Higelaces heordgeneatas, lines 260–1; We synt Higelaces beodgeneatas, lines 342b–343a), specifying his own role (waes min faeder . . . Ecgþeow haten, lines 262–3; Beowulf is min nama, line 343b), and outlining the nature of their errand to Hrothgar (We . . . sunu Healfdenes secean cwomon . . . Habbað we to þæm mæran micel ærende, lines 267–70; Wille ic asecgan sunu Healfdenes, mæran þeodne, min ærende, lines 344–5). Even the introductions to these three-part exchanges with the coastwarden and Wulfgar demonstrate clear echoes (meþelwordum frægn . . . andswarode . . . wordhord onleac . . . mæpelode in lines 236b, 258b, 259b, and 286a is matched by frægn . . . andswarode . . . word æfter spræc . . . mæpelode in lines 332b, 341b, 342b, and 348a). Such repetition in the exchanges the Geats have with both the coastwarden and Wulfgar only highlights the poet’s careful patterning; in some respects, then, Beowulf’s own approach to Heorot is every bit as stylised as that of Grendel.

16 On the particular overtones of mæpelode in these lines, see, for example, McConchie, ‘The Use of the Verb mæpelian in Beowulf’.
17 On which see further above, pp. 78–9 and 189–9.
But in spite of their structural similarity, there are differences between the speeches the coastwarden and Wulfgar make to Beowulf and his men. In particular, the coastwarden, whose opening speech is altogether fuller and more complex than that of Wulfgar, underlines the extraordinary nature of the Geats’ arrival much more than Wulfgar, focusing swiftly on Beowulf himself (lines 247b–251a):

‘Nærfe ic maran geseah
eorla ofer eorþan ðonne is eower sum,
secg on searwum; nis þæt seldguma,
wæpunum geweordæd, næfne him his wlite leoge,
ænlíc ansyn.’

[‘Never have I seen a mightier noble on earth, a warrior in armour, than is one of you; he is no hall-retainer made worthy with weapons: unless his appearance belies him, his peerless face.’]

One might note that the coastwarden pitches his compliment in artful terms, through the use of interlinear alliteration (geseah . . . sum secg . . . searwum . . . seldguma, lines 247b and 248–9); by contrast, none of the negative terms carry the alliteration at all (Nærfe . . . nis . . . næfne, lines 247b, 249b and 250b). In his reply, Beowulf appears to claim that he has the only possible solution to the problems caused by Grendel’s depredations (lines 277b–285):

‘Ic þæs Hroðgar mæg
þurh rumne sefan ræd gelæræn,
hu he frod ond god feonð oferswyðeþ,
gyf him edwendan næfne scolde
bealuwa bisigu, bot eft cuman,
ond þa ceawylmas colran wūðaþ;
oððe a syðdan earfoðþragæ,
þreanyd þoðlað, þenden þær wunað
on heahstede husa selest.’

[‘I can offer Hrothgar advice from a magnanimous heart, how he, wise and good, can overcome the fiend, if a reverse of the tormenting afflictions should ever come, a remedy again, and those surgings of care grow cool, or else he will ever afterwards endure a time of hardship, while the best of houses remains there in the high place.’]

The coastwarden replies with a gnomic utterance, again artfully decorated with interlinear alliteration, that seems ambiguously phrased (lines 287b–289):

18 Bjork, ‘Speech as Gift’.
19 I accept the emendation of manuscript næfre to næfne at line 250b; the appearance of the word næfre at line 247b may well have confused the scribe, and in any case n/r confusion is well-attested elsewhere. See above, pp. 43–6, and cf. Hubert, ‘The Case for Emendation of Beowulf 250b’; Robinson, ‘Two Non Cruces in Beowulf’, pp. 157–60.
Either he is responding to Beowulf’s suggestion that he alone can offer (presumably verbal) advice to Hrothgar by stating that it is deeds rather than words that count, or the coastwarden is affirming Beowulf’s verbal dexterity as a fitting match to his (at this time supposed) martial valour. The latter possibility seems supported by the generally encouraging (not to say fawning) attitude towards Beowulf that the coastwarden exhibits throughout. Wulfgar too is unremittingly optimistic about the motives of Beowulf and his men (lines 338–9):

‘Wen ic þæt ge for wlenco, nalles for wræcsiðum, ac for higeþrymmum Hroðgar sohton.’

[‘I reckon that from pride, not from the journeys of exile, but from greatness of heart, you sought out Hrothgar.’]

Hrothgar himself is similarly positive, twice attributing Beowulf’s arrival to ‘kindness’ (for arstafum, lines 382a and 458a). Important here is the use of the phrase ‘from pride’ (for wlenco, line 338a), since the same phrase will occur twice more in the poem, with subtle changes of meaning. Here, it can hardly be anything other than a positive statement, varied as it is by the phrase ‘from greatness of heart’ (for higeþrymmum, line 339a), but within less than two hundred lines Unferth will use precisely the same words (for wlence, line 508b) to characterise pejoratively Beowulf’s contest with Breca;24 in the latter case, the term is varied with the phrase for dolgilpe (‘for a foolish boast’, line 509a).25 The fact that two characters within the poem can apparently use the same phrase with opposite meaning, depending on how it is varied, makes it surely significant that the poet himself will later use the same phrase, without any variation at all, to describe Hygelac’s final fateful trip (for wlenco, line 1206a).26 Beowulf’s voyage to Denmark has evidently been undertaken from loftier motives that Hygelac’s raid on Frisia.

As if to emphasise this fact, Beowulf’s response to Wulfgar is fittingly decorous and extremely well-measured (lines 342b–347):

‘We synt Higelaces beodgeneatas; Beowulf is min nama. Wille ic asecgan sunu Healfdenes, mærum þeodne, min ærende,

24 On which see further below, pp. 247–9.
26 See further below, pp. 249 and 261–2.
Once again, Beowulf identifies himself primarily through Hygelac, but here (for the first time in the poem), also identifies himself by name. By contrast, he does not name Hrothgar directly, but rather by a series of decorous circumlocutions (sunu Healfdenes / mærum þeodne . . . aldre þinum . . . hine swa godne, lines 344b–345a, 346a and 347a) Beowulf shows that he recognises that his own mission is a delicate one. Wulfgar’s response is of exactly the same length (five-and-a-half lines), and repeats several of the same elements back to Beowulf, but instead begins by stressing Hrothgar’s majesty (lines 350b–355):

‘Ic þæs wine Deniga, frean Scildinga, frinan wille, beaga bryttan, swa þu bena eart, þeoden mærne, ymb þinne sið, ond þe þa ondsware ædre gecyðan ðe me se goda agifan þenceð.’

[‘I will ask the friend of the Danes about that, the Lord of the Scyldings, giver of rings, since you are a petitioner, the famous prince about your trip, and will swiftly report to you the answer which that good man thinks to give.’]

The repetition (with reversal) of some of the words from Beowulf’s own speech (þeoden mærne, line 353a; cf. mærum þeodne, line 345a; se goda, line 355a; cf. swa godne, 347a), seems clearly deliberate, especially when one realises that the phrases come at precisely the same relative points in each speech. Apart from underlining Hrothgar’s status, however, Wulfgar’s speech is intended to highlight Beowulf’s own role: ‘since you are a petitioner’ (swa þu bena eart, line 352b).

Wulfgar uses the same phrase when he addresses Hrothgar about the Geats: ‘they are petitioners’ (hy benan synt, line 364b). But he also in effect vouches for the visiting Geats, naming Beowulf as the leader (but not mentioning Hygelac at all), asking Hrothgar not to refuse them an audience, and saying of the visitors that ‘they seem worthy in their war-gear’ (hy on wiggetawum wyrðe þincead, line 368). Hrothgar’s response is one of immediate recognition of Beowulf’s name, his family-ties, and his prowess (lines 372–89a). The key thing, from Hrothgar’s point of view, is that Beowulf ‘sought out a loyal friend’ (sohte holdne wine, line 376b); therefore, any supposed offer of help will come from one repaying an old kindness. After more courtly manoeuvring, during which Hrothgar tells Wulfgar to tell the Geats that they are ‘welcome’ (wilcuman, line 388b), he does so (wilcuman, line 394b), also telling them to leave their weapons outside, Beowulf finally faces the king of Denmark.

Beowulf’s opening speech to Hrothgar is highly crafted, and shows both the poet and his hero in a fine light. The poet describes Beowulf standing arrayed in
the splendid mailcoat of a skilful smith (on him byrne scan, searonet seowed
snipes orpancum, lines 405b–406), but it is not until the end of Beowulf’s own
speech that we learn that it is the ‘best of battle-dresses’, and that the smith in
question is none other than the legendary Weland (beaduscruða betst . . . hrægla
selest . . . Welandes geweorc, lines 453–5a).27 Beowulf does not merely bandy
words, however, he gets right down to basics from the beginning (lines 407–10):

‘Wæs þu, Hroðgar, hal! Ic eom Higelaces
mæg ond magoðegn; hæbbe ic mærða fela
ongunnen on geogoðe. Me wearð Grendles þing
on minre eþeltyrf undyrne cuð.’

[‘Greetings, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac’s kinsman and retainer; I have
accomplished many bold deeds in my youth: the matter of Grendel was
made plainly known to me in my home country.’]

Even such a bland, even blunt, opening carries a number of resonances. As with
his first speech to the coastwarden, and his first speech with Wulfgar, here for
the third time Beowulf begins a speech by identifying himself primarily through
his lord, Hygelac; since at the end of this speech Beowulf again nominates his
lord to receive his mailshirt should he perish, the entire address can be said to be
based on the so-called envelope-pattern that is so common throughout the
poem.28 Beowulf’s gentle allusion to Hrothgar’s difficulties as ‘the matter of
Grendel’ (Grendles þing, line 409b) is likewise loaded; later in the same speech
Beowulf undertakes to raise the matter formally with his foe (lines 425b–426a).
Even the fact that Grendel’s deeds have been made ‘plainly known’ to Beowulf
(wearð . . . undyrne cuð, lines 409b–410) simply echoes the poet’s own earlier
assertion that tales of Grendel’s wrongdoing had been made ‘plainly known’ to
men through sorrowful songs (wearð . . . undyrne cuð, lines 149b–150).
Beowulf goes on to establish his credentials in more detail: he has in the past, to
avenge aggression against the Geats (line 423a), ‘laid low the kin of giants, and
in the waves slain sea-monsters by night’ (yðde eotena cyn ond on yðum slog
niceras nihtes, lines 421–2a). As a result, ‘wise men’ (snotere ceorlas, line 416b)
encouraged him to offer help to the Danes. Beowulf’s account squares with the
poet’s own earlier description of how ‘wise men in no way discouraged him
from that trip . . . they urged on the brave man’ (Döne siðfæt him snotere ceorlas
lythwon logon . . . hweeton higerofne, lines 202–4), and sits uncomfortably with
the later assertion of Hygelac that he tried to persuade Beowulf not to go, but to
leave the Danes to their own devices (lines 1994b–1997a).29 In any case,
Beowulf, given his proven ability against ‘the kin of giants’ and ‘sea-monsters’,
claims the right to fight the scourge of Heorot (lines 424b–426a):30

27 On Weland, see above, pp. 98, 115, and 169.
28 On the use of the envelope-pattern in general, see above, pp. 78–85.
29 See above, pp. 203–4.
30 Stanley, ‘Two Old English Poetic Phrases Insufficiently Understood for Literary Criticism’.
‘And now against Grendel, against that awesome assailant, against the ogre, I ought alone to raise matters.’

Beowulf’s threefold description of his foe is surely telling, as his insistence that he will do the deed alone, as he later repeats (ana, line 431a). Such self-absorption is elsewhere typical of Beowulf’s discourse and general attitude: here he employs no fewer than twenty-eight first-person references in forty-nine lines. In vowing to match Grendel and forsake the use of weapons, Beowulf acknowledges the murderous (not to say all-consuming) nature of his opponent, and exhibits a grim sense of humour about his own potential fate (lines 445b–451):

‘You will not need to cover my head, but he will have me covered with blood, if death takes me. He will bear off the bloody corpse, think to savour it, the solitary wanderer will eat it without remorse, mark the wetland-slopes; you will not need to grieve for long about how to take care of my body.’

The whole passage is crafted after the familiar form of the envelope-pattern (Na þu . . . þearft, line 445b; no ðu . . . þearft, line 450b), is divided into two by echoic wordplay (byr-/ byr-, line 448; compare earlier in the speech yð-/ yð-, line 421), and hinges on a number of instances of paronomasia: byrgean means both ‘to taste’ and ‘to bury’; feorm means both ‘sustenance’ and ‘disposal (of a corpse)’; unmurnlice means both ‘without mourning’ and ‘ruthlessly’; the verb mearcād (alliterating with both unmurnlice and especially morhopu) may likewise carry some resonance of the fact that both Grendel and his mother are ‘march-dwellers’ (mearcstapa, line 103a; mearcstapan, line 1348a). Thus, Beowulf amply lives up to the Norse eddic injunction for a warrior to be glad and cheerful right up until he dies.

Hrothgar’s response is likewise well in keeping with his character: he reas-

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31 See below, pp. 261–2.
32 The same pun is found in The Dream of the Rood, line 101.
33 One might compare the usage in line 744b (gefórmód).
34 On the significance of the pun mær-/ mearc-/ mor-, which occurs elsewhere in the poem, see Sharma, ‘Movement and Space as Metaphor in Old English Poetry’, pp. 207–39.
serts his belief that Beowulf has come from the best motives,\textsuperscript{36} gently reminds Beowulf that he settled his father’s feud with money, and then spends some sixteen lines bemoaning his own problems with Grendel (lines 473–88); a final two lines rather abruptly seem simply to invite Beowulf to sit and enjoy the feast.\textsuperscript{37} In fact, the feast in question is dominated by Beowulf’s word-battle with Unferth,\textsuperscript{38} which, however, again needs to be seen as part of the carefully choreographed sequence of speeches preceding Beowulf’s first fight. The notion that Unferth’s verbal attack on Beowulf serves a formal purpose seems underlined by the delighted response of the Danes, who seem neither perturbed at the apparently harsh treatment meted out to their guest, nor offended at his unfavourable comparison of his own might and that of the Danes. Hrothgar in particular is depicted as delighted by Beowulf’s unanswerable put-down of Unferth’s attack (lines 607–12a):\textsuperscript{39}

\begin{quote}
Þa wæs on salum sinces brytta, 
gamolfeax ond guðrof; geocyte gelyfde 
brego Beorhtdena, gehyrde on Beowulf 
folces hyrde fæstræne gepohst.

\textit{Deær wæs hæleþa hleahtor, hlyn swynsode, word wæron wynsume.}

[Then the distributor of treasure filled with pleasure, grey-haired and battle-bold; the ruler of the Bright-Danes counted on help, the people’s shepherd heard from Beowulf a firm resolution. There was the laughter of warriors, delight resounded, words were joyful.]
\end{quote}

The noises of glee are echoed in the range of sound-effects in this short passage, which contains plentiful assonance (\textit{gehyrde . . . hyrde}, lines 609b–610a; \textit{hlyn swynsode . . . wynsume}, lines 611–12a), and which introduces the first appearance of Wealhtheow, Hrothgar’s stately queen, decked in gold (\textit{goldhroden}, line 614a).\textsuperscript{40} After she has served the assembled company, Beowulf vows again to do or die (lines 632–41), and Wealhtheow, decked in gold (\textit{goldhroden}, line 640b), goes to sit by her lord, who eventually leaves the hall to Beowulf, promising great rewards if he is successful.

Beowulf’s final vow before the company all retire is revealing, since it demonstrates that he is not quite perfect: he vows to fight without a sword, although he asserts that he could readily slay Grendel with one (lines 679–80); such an assertion is wholly unfounded, as several of Beowulf’s own retainers,

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{36}{Despite the difficulties with interpreting the manuscript-reading \textit{fere fyhtum} at line 457a, whatever reading is adopted, the sense, varied by ‘and out of kindness’ (\textit{ond for arstafum}, line 258a) is surely positive.}
\footnotetext{37}{The chief difficulty lies with line 489b (\textit{ond onsæl meoto}), since the precise form and function of the word \textit{meoto} in the line seems unclear. Mitchell and Robinson, ed., \textit{Beowulf}, p. 64, propose translating lines 489–90 as follows: ‘Sit now to the feast, and unbind [your] thought, the glory of victory to men, as your mind moves you’. As they put it: ‘The meaning “thought” assigned here to the nonce-word \textit{meoto} is conjectural’.}
\footnotetext{38}{On which see below, pp. 247–55.}
\footnotetext{39}{For the comparison, see below, pp. 254–5.}
\footnotetext{40}{The beginning of the description of Wealhtheow continues the assonance (\textit{cynna gemyndig}, line 613b).}
\end{footnotes}
attempting to intervene in the fray, soon discover (lines 798–805a). Nor is this
the only time that one of Beowulf’s assertions will prove untrue: before he
fights Grendel’s mother he says that ‘I shall gain glory with Hrunting or death
will take me off!’ (ic me mid Hruntinge / dom gewyrce oþðe mec deað nimeð,
lines 1490b–1491), and (in an obviously parallel construction) before he fights
the dragon he says that ‘I shall gain the gold by valour or battle, the perilous
harm to life, will take off your lord!’ (ic mid ealne sceall / gold gegangen oððe
guð nimeð / feorhbealu freene frean eowerne, lines 2535b–2537). In neither case
does his confident prediction quite come true: against Grendel’s mother,
Hrunting fails him, but he still gains the victory, whereas against the dragon, he
gets the gold and death gets him.

All of Beowulf’s speeches, however, are marked by an authority and assur-
ance that sets him apart from the other figures in the poem. Part of this effect
stems from his frequent use of gnomic or proverbial statements, which lend his
utterances a sense of conviction, if not truth. So, he concludes his first speech
to Hrothgar with a simple gnomic statement: ‘Fate always goes as it must!’
(Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel, line 455b). The same kind of fatalistic confidence
underlies his gnomic assertion in his speech to Unferth that ‘fate often spares an
undoomed man, if his courage endures’ (wyrd oft nereð / unfægne eorl, þonne
his ellen deah, lines 572b–573).43 Even when attempting to comfort Hrothgar
for the loss of his favourite thegn, Æschere, at the vengeful hands of Grendel’s
mother, Beowulf lapses into gnomic expression (lines 1384–9):

‘Ne sorga, snotor guma;  selre bīð æghwæm
þæt he his freond wrece,  þonne he fela murne.
Ure æghwylc sceal  ende gebidan
worlde lifes;  wyrce se þe mote
domes ær deapæ;  þæt bīð drihtguman
unlifgendum  æfter selest.’

[‘Grieve not, wise man: it is better for everyone that he avenge his friend
than mourn overmuch. Each of us has to endure an end to life in the
world, let him who can gain glory before death: that is the best legacy
for a dead noble.’]

Beowulf’s words of comfort are essentially restricted to the first two words of
this speech (Ne sorga, line 1384a); what follows is a developing chain of three
gnomic sentiments, couched in an envelope pattern (selre . . . selest), which turn
the focus away from Hrothgar and his grief entirely, and pave the way for
Beowulf’s own action. Sandwiched between those twin pillars of heroic desire,

41 See above, p. 35.
42 In general, see, Burlin, ‘Gnomic Indirection in Beowulf’; Cavill, ‘Beowulf and Andreas: Two
Maxims’; idem, Maxims in Old English Poetry; Deskis, ‘Beowulf’ and the Medieval Proverb Trad-
of Beowulf’.
43 On the concept of wyrd as it is applied in the poem in general, see, for example, Davis, ‘Beowulf’ and
the Demise of Germanic Legend in England, pp. 135–57; Major, ‘A Christian wyrd: Syncretism in
Beowulf’; North, ‘“Wyrd” and “weard” in Beowulf’; Phillpotts, ‘Wyrd and Providence in
Anglo-Saxon Thought’; Tietjen, ‘God, Fate, and the Hero of Beowulf’.
namely vengeance and glory, is a brief acceptance of the mortal lot that will be precisely echoed when the time for Beowulf’s own death (and that of the dragon) draws near (lines 2341b–2344, with emphasis added; cf. 1386–7):

Sceolde liþendaga
æþeling ærgod ende gebidan,
worulde lifes, ond se wyrm somod,
þeah ðe hordwelan heolde lange.
[The prince, good of old, had to endure the end of his transitory days, of life’s joy, and the dragon too, even though he had held the treasure long.] No clearer indication could be given of the extent to which Beowulf himself, for all his attachment to gnomic sentiments, is himself ultimately powerless in the face of implacable fate.

The careful patterning of the first seventeen speeches in Beowulf seems clearly designed to point up Heorot as a courtly, cultured, mannered place. Likewise, careful patterning is exhibited in the speeches exchanged by Beowulf and Hrothgar during the rest of his stay. After his defeat of Grendel, the two meet outside Heorot to marvel at Grendel’s torn-off claw: Hrothgar speaks (lines 928–56) and Beowulf responds (lines 958–79); similarly, after the nocturnal visit of Grendel’s mother, the pair meet again to comiserate, this time inside Heorot: again, Hrothgar speaks (lines 1322–82) and Beowulf responds (lines 1384–96). Beowulf’s boast at the monster-mere (lines 1474–91) echoes that made in Heorot before the fight with Grendel (lines 677–87), just as the lengthy exchange when Beowulf hands over the hilt of the monstrous sword and Hrothgar ponders on it (lines 1652–76 and 1700–84) parallels their conversation gazing on Grendel’s claw. Beowulf and Hrothgar speak just once more, when they have to part forever. The Beowulf-poet’s careful disposition of the speeches is apparent.

Beowulf’s final speech to Hrothgar (lines 1818–39) is likewise both generous

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45 The manuscript is defective at line 2341b; for the reading liþendaga, see Mitchell and Robinson, ed., Beowulf, p. 131.

46 Cf. Stanley, ‘Courtliness and Courtesy in Beowulf and Elsewhere in English Medieval Literature’.

47 It is striking how many of the speeches in Part I of the poem (lines 1–2199) take place inside (eighteen out of thirty), and how few in Part II (two out of nine); such a difference is symptomatic of the great differences in tone between the two parts of the poem.

48 It is worth noting that these are the only exchanges in the poem between the two when Hrothgar speaks first. See Table IV above, pp. 206–7.
and judicious: he mentions his own willingness to sail back to Denmark to give Hrothgar help in future, should he need it, and suggests that Hrethric, Hrothgar’s son, will find a warm welcome amongst the Geats, should he pay a visit. It seems odd that Beowulf should single out just one of Hrothgar’s sons in this way, and it may be that there is some connection between Hrethric and the shadowy figure called Roricus, who, Saxo Grammaticus declares, was killed by Rolvo (Old English Hrothulf). Beowulf may unwittingly be drawing the attention of the audience to the forthcoming usurpation of the Danish throne by Hrothulf. Certainly it is striking that, in a more explicit case later in the poem when the Swedish king, Onela, quarrels with his brother’s two sons, they do flee to the land of the Geats, albeit with grim consequences. Moreover, the faith that Beowulf puts in the support of Hygelac for helping the Danes in future seems misplaced in the light of Hygelac’s own later statement that in the case of Grendel’s depredations he had wanted Beowulf simply to let the Danes deal with their own problems (lines 1994b–1997a):

\[
\text{‘Ic ðe lange bæd
\begin{align*}
\& \text{ht đu ðone wælgæst wihte ne grette,} \\
\& \text{lete Suðdene sylfe geweorðan} \\
\& \text{guðe wið Grendel.’}\end{align*}
\]
\]

[‘For a long time I asked you not to confront in any way that murderous spirit, to let the South-Danes themselves wage war against Grendel.’]

In the light of what subsequently transpires on one of Hygelac’s own foreign adventures, not to mention the disasters that face almost all the characters bar Beowulf who venture abroad, the gnomic statement with which Beowulf concludes his final speech to Hrothgar seems somewhat loaded (lines 1838b–1839):

\[
\text{‘feorceyðe beoð
\begin{align*}
\& \text{selran gesohte } \text{þæm } \text{þæm } \text{þæm } \text{þæm } \text{þæm } \text{þæm } \text{þæm } \text{þæm } \\
\& \text{him selfa deah.’}\end{align*}
\]
\]

[‘distant lands are better sought by one who is himself of worth.’]

Hrothgar’s own final words (lines 1841–65) again reveal his preoccupation with death and dying: he focuses on the possible end of Hygelac with an abbreviated litany of catastrophes (‘spear . . . sickness . . . sword’: gar . . . adl . . . iren, lines 1846b and 1848a) which nonetheless echoes the grim warnings to Beowulf that he had uttered the night before (lines 1761b–1768):\(^{50}\)

\[
\text{Nu is þines mægnes blæd
\begin{align*}
\& \text{ane hwile. Eft sona bið} \\
\& \text{þæt ðec adl oððe ecg } \text{eafþes getwæfed}, \\
\& \text{oððe fyres feng, } \text{oððe flodes wylm,} \\
\& \text{oððe gripe mceces, } \text{oððe gares fliht,} \\
\& \text{oððe atol yldo; } \text{oððe eagena bearhtm}\end{align*}
\]
\]

\(^{50}\) For more on this passage, see above, pp. 160–1.
forsiteð ond forsworceð; semninga bið
þæt ðec, dryhtguma, deað oferswyðeð.
[Now the glory of your might lasts for a brief while; but suddenly it will happen that sickness or the sword will split you from your power, or the clutch of fire, or the surge of water, or a blade’s grip, or a spear’s flight, or dread old age, or the brightness of your eyes will fail and grow dim; at last it will happen that death will overcome you, brave warrior.]

Hrothgar’s melancholy thoughts are heightened further by the fact of Beowulf’s own imminent departure, and the aged king’s esteem for the departing warrior could not be clearer; not only does he openly declare him a paragon in thought, word, and deed (Pu eart mægenes strang ond on mode frol, wis wordcwida, lines 1844–5a), but he is greatly affected by Beowulf’s departure, in a touchingly depicted scene (lines 1870–80a):

Gecyste þa cyning æþelum god, 1870
þeoden Scyldinga, ðegn betstan
ond be healser genam; hruron him tearas,
blondenfeaxum. Him wæs bega wen,
ealdum infrodam, óþres swiðor,
þæt hie seoððan no geseon moston, 1875
modige on meþle. Wæs him se man to þon leof
þæt he þone breostwylm forberan ne mehte,
ac him on hreþre hygebendum fæst
eæfter deorum men dyrne langað
beorn wið blode. 1880

[Then the king noble in descent, the ruler of the Scyldings, kissed the best of warriors, and embraced his neck; tears fell from the grey-haired man. Old, experienced, he thought of two outcomes, one more likely, that they would never see each other again, bold men in council. The man was too dear to him than that he could hold back his surging emotions, but in his heart, secure in thought, a hidden longing for the beloved man burned in his blood.]

This moving image brings to a close Beowulf’s adventures in Denmark, and the sad and brooding tone established here looks ahead to the dominant mood that hangs over most of the second part of the poem. Before, during, and after the dragon-fight that forms the climax to events in Geatland, however, there is an unmistakable sense that the decorous patterning of speeches and actions that is the hallmark of activity in and around Heorot break down completely. Indeed, such is the care with which the Beowulf-poet has set up expectations of a patterned sequence of ordered speech that the sensitive reader cannot but feel disturbed when that expected arrangement fails. When, as is the case with the only female speeches in the poem, the sequence of speech and response is broken not once, but twice, a strong sense of foreboding seems only natural.

52 The manuscript reads he seoðða . . . geseon at line 1875a.
The sound of silence: Wealhtheow’s unanswered speeches

As a character, Wealhtheow has excited a fair share of critical attention. Her name, which apparently means ‘foreign slave’, seems at odds with her queenly status, although in fact no character in the poem addresses her by name at all; it seems likely that she is meant to be interpreted as a non-Dane married off to Hrothgar for political reasons. But if she is undermined by her very name and apparently precarious position, Wealhtheow herself seems to feel every inch a queen. In her very first speech in *Beowulf*, Wealhtheow is evidently at pains to address Hrothgar’s intention, explicitly expressed in his preceding speech, that he will take Beowulf for a son (lines 946b–949a):

‘Nu ic, Beowulf, þec,  
secg betsta, me for sunu wylle  
frogan on ferhþe; heald forð tela  
niwe sibbe.’

[‘Now I, Beowulf, best of men, will love you like a son in my heart; henceforth keep well this new kinship.’]

In the more than two hundred lines intervening before Wealhtheow’s majestic appearance in the hall, we have heard Beowulf’s reply (lines 958–79), in which he makes no reference at all to his newly-won status, and have been given a detailed description of the celebration-banquet in Heorot, with its lavish gift-giving and recital of the story of Finn.

Wealhtheow’s subsequent speech to her lord deserves quotation in full (lines 1169–87):

‘Onfoh þissum fulle, freodrihten min,  
sinces brytta. Þu on sælum wes,  
goldwine gumena, ond to Geatum spræc  
mildum wordum, swa sceal man don.  
Beo wið Geatas glæd, geofena gemyndig,  
nean ond feorran þe þu nu hafast.  
Me man sægde þæt þu ðe for sunu wolde1175  
hererinc habban. Heorot is gefælsod,  
beahsele beorhta; bruc þenden þu mote  
manigra medo, ond þinum magum læf  
folc ond rice, þonne ðu forð scyle  
metodscæft seon. Îc minne can  
glædne Hroþulf, þæt he þa geogoðe wile

54 On meaningful names elsewhere in the poem, see above, pp. 172–3.
55 See further above, pp. 83–4.
56 On which see above, pp. 173–87.
57 The manuscript omits þe in line 1174b (through haplography?), and reads here ric in line 1176a; see further above, p. 181.
arum healdan, gyf þu ær þonne he, 1185
wine Scildinga, worold oflæthest;
wene ic þæt he mid gode gyldan wille
uncran eaferan, gif he þæt eal gemon,
hwæt wit to willan ond to worðmyndum
umborwesendum ær arna gefremedon.’

[‘Take this cup, my beloved lord, giver of treasure; be in high spirits, gold-friend of men, and speak to the Geats with generous words, as one ought to do. Be gracious to the Geats, mindful of the gifts far and near, which you now possess. I’ve been told that you wished to have the warrior as a son. Heorot is cleansed, bright ring-hall; enjoy, while you may the esteem of many, and leave the people and kingdom to your kinsmen, when you have to pass on, experience fate’s decree. I know my gracious Hrothulf, that he will treat the youth kindly, if you, friend of the Scyldings, should leave the world before him; I expect that he will deal well with our sons, if he remembers all the kindnesses that the two of us did him to please and honour him when he was young.’]

From the opening word of her speech, Wealhtheow establishes herself as one who speaks primarily in the imperative mood; she issues no fewer than four such imperatives in the first six lines (Onfôh . . . wês . . . spræc . . . Beo, lines 1169–70, 1171b and 1173a), before coming to the point: ‘I’ve been told that you wished to have the warrior as a son’ (Me man sægde þæt þu ðe for sunu wolde / hererinc habban, lines 1175–6a). Two more imperatives follow (bruc . . . læf; lines 1177b and 1178b). The weakness of her position is made crystal-clear in the second part of the speech, which is basically composed of two conditional sentences (Ic . . . can . . . gyf; wene ic . . . gif; lines 1180b–1181 and 1184–5), the outcome of both of which an audience with any sense of dynastic Scylding history would know: Hrothulf did indeed outlive his uncle, and was less than kind to his cousins.58

Wealhtheow knows none of this, of course: maternal concern alone shines through this rather crude attempt to meddle in high politics, and immediately after this speech, Wealhtheow heads straight for her sons (lines 1188–91):

Hwearf þa bi bence þær hyre byre wæron, 1190
Hreðric ond Hroðmund, ond hæleþa bearn,
giogoð ætgædere; þær se goda sæt,
Beowulf Geata, be þæm gebroðrum twæm.

[Then she turned along the bench, where her boys were, Hrethric ond Hrothmund, with warriors’ sons, the youth together; there the good man sat, Beowulf of the Geats, beside the two brothers.]

Beowulf’s position is of course indicative of his new status, and it comes as no surprise that Wealhtheow should, like her husband, seek to reward him for his deeds against Grendel by offering him a number of gifts, including a splendid

58 See below, pp. 246–7.
‘Bruc ðisses beages, Beowulf leofa, hyse, mid hæle, ond ðisses hrægles neot, þedgestreona, ond geþeoh tela, cen þec mid crafte ond þyssum cnyhtum wes lara liðe; ic þe þæs lean geman. Hafast þu gefered þæt de feor ond neah ealne widerferhþ weras ehtigað, efne swa side swa sæ bebugeð, windgeard, weallas. Wes þenden þu lifige, æþeling, eadig. Ic þe an tela sincgestreona. Beo þu suna minum dædum gedefe, dreamhealdende. Her is æghwylc eorl oþrum getrywe, modes milde, mandrihtne hold; þegnas syndon geþwære, þeod ealgearo druncne dryhtguman doð swa ic bidde.’

[‘Enjoy this ring, dear Beowulf, with good fortune, young man, and make use of this accoutrement, mighty treasures, and prosper well, make yourself known through power, and be kind in advice to these boys: I’ll bear in mind a reward for you for that. You have brought it about that far and near men will praise you always, as far as the sea, the wind-enclosure, surrounds the cliffs. Be, as long as you live, a happy prince. I grant you a multitude of precious treasures. Be to my sons kind in deeds, joyful. Here is each warrior true to the other, mild of spirit, loyal to their lord. The thegns are united, a people fully prepared, the retainers have drunk [loyally]: they do as I bid.’]

Once again, her speech is notable for the large number of imperatives employed: I count at least seven (Bruc...n e o t...g eþeoh...c e n...w e s...W e s...B e o, lines 1216–19, 1224b and 1226b). As with her previous speech to Hrothgar, she expresses confidence in those around her, but again, she seems somewhat undermined by circumstances: her comment that ‘Here is each warrior true to the other’ (Her is æghwylc eorl oþrum getrywe, line 1228) echoes eerily a comment made only a short time before by the poet when scanning over Hrothulf and Hrothgar sitting together that ‘at that time their kinship was still intact, each true to the other’ (þa gyt was hiera sib ætgædere, æghwylc oðrum trywe, lines 1164b–5a). But that comment seemed to forecast the end of peaceful co-existence. Once again, Wealhtheow is not answered: she just heads off to the bench (Eode þa to setle, line 1232a). The fact that neither Beowulf nor Hrothgar sees fit to respond to Wealhtheow’s speeches in any way is surely

59 On the significance of this neck-ring, see above, pp. 114–16.
60 The manuscript reads peo ge streona at line 1218a and hol at line 1229b.
61 I say ‘at least’, since it has been argued by Bammesberger, ‘The Conclusion of Wealhtheow’s Speech (Beowulf 1231)’, that doð (line 1231b) should also be construed as an imperative. In that case, Wealhtheow is effectively commanding Beowulf and Hrothgar to ‘do as I say’.
striking in the context of the decorous speech-patterning that characterises the whole of the first part of the poem. If in a sense a woman’s words are her only weapons,63 then it must be concluded that none of Wealhtheow’s words have hit home.

Words, gifts, and the gift of words: Beowulf’s return home

But if the decorous and courtly nature of the Danish court is to some extent delimited and defined by the careful patterning of the speeches, it is interesting to note that in the telling of Beowulf’s triumphant return to Geatland, speeches appear to play a quite different role. The mechanics of Beowulf’s homecoming are crisply told: a sword is given to the Danish coastwarden (lines 1900–3a); the voyage is undertaken and briefly described (lines 1903b–1913), in a manner which matches in miniature the previous description of Beowulf’s voyage to Denmark; even the distance from the coast to Hygelac’s court is said to be short (lines 1920–4).64 There follows, as commonly in Beowulf, what seems at first outright and unalloyed praise for the court of the Geats, which, however, gives way to more ominous words (lines 1925–31a):65

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>诗句</th>
<th>解释</th>
</tr>
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| 1925  | Bold  | 雄伟，英勇的国王，高高在殿堂，海德非常年轻，智慧和能工巧匠，
       | ïæm ðë wintra lyt | 以至于她在围着城墙的城堡里度过了多少个冬天。
|       | Hygd  | 非常年轻，智慧和能工巧匠，
|       | swiðe | swiðe geong,                                                          |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh hæbbe,                                                           |
|       |  healle |  healle,                                                              |
|       | nea hio hnah swa | nea hio hnah swa ðæh,                                                |
|       | swa  | swa ðæh,                                                              |
|       | healle | healle,                                                               |
|       | Geata | Geata leodum,                                                         |
|       | leodum | leodum,                                                               |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh geong,                                                            |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh hæbbe,                                                           |
|       |  healle |  healle,                                                              |
|       | nea hio hnah swa | nea hio hnah swa ðæh,                                                |
|       | swa  | swa ðæh,                                                              |
|       | healle | healle,                                                               |
|       | leodum | leodum,                                                               |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh geong,                                                            |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh hæbbe,                                                           |
|       |  healle |  healle,                                                              |
|       | nea hio hnah swa | nea hio hnah swa ðæh,                                                |
|       | swa  | swa ðæh,                                                              |
|       | healle | healle,                                                               |
|       | leodum | leodum,                                                               |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh geong,                                                            |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh hæbbe,                                                           |
|       |  healle |  healle,                                                              |
|       | nea hio hnah swa | nea hio hnah swa ðæh,                                                |
|       | swa  | swa ðæh,                                                              |
|       | healle | healle,                                                               |
|       | leodum | leodum,                                                               |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh geong,                                                            |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh hæbbe,                                                           |
|       |  healle |  healle,                                                              |
|       | nea hio hnah swa | nea hio hnah swa ðæh,                                                |
|       | swa  | swa ðæh,                                                              |
|       | healle | healle,                                                               |
|       | leodum | leodum,                                                               |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh geong,                                                            |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh hæbbe,                                                           |
|       |  healle |  healle,                                                              |
|       | nea hio hnah swa | nea hio hnah swa ðæh,                                                |
|       | swa  | swa ðæh,                                                              |
|       | healle | healle,                                                               |
|       | leodum | leodum,                                                               |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh geong,                                                            |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh hæbbe,                                                           |
|       |  healle |  healle,                                                              |
|       | nea hio hnah swa | nea hio hnah swa ðæh,                                                |
|       | swa  | swa ðæh,                                                              |
|       | healle | healle,                                                               |
|       | leodum | leodum,                                                               |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh geong,                                                            |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh hæbbe,                                                           |
|       |  healle |  healle,                                                              |
|       | nea hio hnah swa | nea hio hnah swa ðæh,                                                |
|       | swa  | swa ðæh,                                                              |
|       | healle | healle,                                                               |
|       | leodum | leodum,                                                               |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh geong,                                                            |
|       | ðæh  | ðæh hæbbe,                                                           |

[The building was magnificent, the king mighty, exalted in the hall, Hygd very young, wise and accomplished, even though she had lived few winters in the enclosed stronghold, the daughter of Hæreth; she was not niggardly, nor too sparing of gifts, precious treasures, to the people of the Geats.]

Once the hall, king, and queen of the Geats have been lavishly praised, the poet introduces a series of negatives concerning Hygd that seem paradoxically ungenerous: why not simply say that Hygd gave many gifts?66 Unfortunately, the three half-lines that follow are obscure (lines 1931b–32); the manuscript clearly reads mod þryðo wæg fremu folces cwen firen ondrysne, and indeed there is no controversy about the meaning of the last five words: a ‘lofty queen of the people’ (fremu folces cwenn) is the subject, and ‘dreadful wickedness’ (firen ondrysne) is the object. Successive critics and editors, however, have been unsure whether a new character, called variously Modthrytho or Thryth, has

63 Cf. Strauss, ‘Women’s Words as Weapons’.
64 Cf. Irving, ‘Beowulf Comes Home: Close Reading in Epic Context’.
65 The manuscript reads hea healle in line 1926a, but the sense seems incomplete.
been abruptly introduced, and it is she who is the ‘lofty queen’ who has ‘committed’ (wæg) the ‘dreadful wickedness’, or whether Hygd herself is being chastised for exercising earlier ‘arrogance’ (if that is the meaning of the otherwise unattested compound modþryðo). The difficulty with the latter interpretation is how to square the poet’s subsequent statement that the ‘dreadful wickedness’ perpetrated by this queenly figure consisted of the imperious slaughter of men who dared stare openly at her, a flaw cured by Offa in a standard rehearsal of the ‘taming of the shrew’ motif,67 who caused her to become a model queen by marrying her on her father’s advice; it is hard to believe that Hygd could have married Offa at some unspecified point in the past after a career of destruction, then later married Hygelac, and yet still be described as ‘very young’ (swiðe geong, line 1926b).68 A third possibility seems plausible, which removes both the abruptness of a sudden change of subject at line 1931b, introducing a new character, and the otherwise cramped chronology of Hygd’s early life, namely that the model behaviour of Hygd (whose name means something like ‘thought’ or ‘pondered’ (if wæg can bear this abstract sense) the ‘mood’ or ‘pride’ of Thryth (whose name means something like ‘strength’).69

At all events, it is striking that the poet has chosen to interject this episode into the narrative of Beowulf’s homecoming: although the physical distance between the shore and Hygelac’s hall is not far (as we are repeatedly told: næs him feor þanon, line 1921b; sæwealle neah, line 1924b), some fifty lines intervene between Beowulf’s ship landing (line 1913) and him leaving the shore (line 1963). Hygelac is reintroduced, in terms which suggest a flattering comparison with the recently lauded Offa; just as Offa’s martial prowess and generosity have been praised (Offa wæs geofum ond guðum garcene man wide geweorðod, lines 1957b–1959a), so too the same qualities are discerned in the young Hygelac, identified initially only as the ‘slayer of Ongentheow’ (eorla hleo bonan Ongenþeoes . . . geongne guðcyning godne . . . hringas dælan, lines 1967b–1970a). It may be more than an oversight that the poet fails to mention that Hygelac shares the third of Offa’s virtues, namely that he ‘governed his native land with wisdom’ (wisdome heold, eðel sinne, lines 1959b–1960a); certainly wisdom is not the hallmark of Hygelac’s known words and deeds.70

The most noticeable feature of Beowulf’s own account of his battles with Grendel and his mother (lines 2069b–2143) is the extent to which it offers additional details to those already presented:71 for example, here we learn for the first time the name of the Geat killed by Grendel – Hondscio (line 2076a) – and the fact that in his predations Grendel carried a ‘glove’ made of ‘the skins of dragons’ (Glof, line 2086b; dracan fellum, line 2088b).72 Aside from these details, which are seemingly linked (the common noun hondscio would seem to

68 See above, pp. 83–4.
69 On meaningful personal names in the poem, see above, pp. 172–3.
70 On Hygelac’s wider role in the poem, see above, pp. 98–9, 134–5, and 210.
72 See above, pp. 121–3.
mean ‘glove’), however, we are – most importantly – presented with Beowulf’s own perspective. As Rosemary Huisman has pointed out, this is in fact the third account of the fight with Grendel in the poem: Beowulf has already made a brief report to Hrothgar (lines 958–79), although in that instance there is no mention of the motivation for his battle, nor of the reward.73 Both of these aspects were, of course, more properly Hrothgar’s own concern, and Beowulf also adds a touching description of the old king, worn down by his difficulties (lines 2105–14):

> ‘ðær wæs gidd ond gleo: gomela Scilding,
> felafricgende, feorran rehte;
> hwilum hildedeor hearpan wynne,
> gomenwudu grette, hwilum gyd awræc
> soð ond sarlic, hwilum sylic spell
> rehte æfter rihte rumheort cyning.
> 
> Hwilum eft ongan, eldo gebunden,
> gomel guðwiga gioguðe cwiðan,
> hildestrengo; hreðer inne weoll,
> þonne he wintrum frod worn gemunde.’

[‘There was singing and joyful noise; the aged Scylding, having learned many things, recounted tales from long ago; sometimes the battle-brave one struck the delightful wood, the harp’s joy, sometimes told a tale, true and mournful; sometimes the great-hearted king properly narrated a strange story; sometimes again, fettered by age, the old warrior began to mourn his youth, his battle-strength; his heart surged inside when, old in winters, he recalled many things.’]

The careful patterning of this passage, with its fourfold repetition of ‘sometimes’ (hwilum),74 offers a fresh perspective on Hrothgar, which again contrasts with that of Beowulf himself, who, for all his skill with words, seems prone to melancholy outburst only at the very end of his life.75 In other respects, however, this passage echoes in miniature a pattern we have seen many times in Beowulf. Once again, we find joy giving way to sorrow in this passage (gleo . . . wynne . . . gomenwudu . . . sarlic . . . cwiðan, lines 2105–12).76

Throughout his speech to Hygelac, Beowulf presents the fight with Grendel very much as a matter of revenge for the murdered Hondscio, and as a personal struggle to prevent being placed in Grendel’s ‘glove’ and so going the way of all human flesh hitherto. In what some modern readers may feel is an ironic observation in a speech of over 150 lines, Beowulf proclaims that the details of the fight are ‘too long to tell’, but goes on to assure his lord that the deed redounds to the glory of all the Geats (lines 2093–6a):77

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73 Huisman, ‘The Three Tellings of Beowulf’s Fight with Grendel’s Mother’.
74 On this incremental pattern, see above, pp. 78–85.
75 See further below, pp. 227–37.
76 On the frequency of this pattern in the poem as a whole, see above, pp. 63–4 and 77–8.
77 Most emend hondlean to ondlean (for andlean, ‘recompense’); hondlean seems wholly appropriate, as at line 1541b (again, handlean forgeald, here used of Beowulf’s encounter with Grendel’s mother); see too lines 2929b and 2972b.
Beowulf places his own might at the disposal of his lord (peoden min, line 2095a), whose people (pine leode, line 2095b) are thereby honoured; the extent to which Beowulf diminishes his own role and exalts that of Hygelac is implicit in the very structure of line 2095: words referring to Hygelac alliterate (peoden and, especially, pine), whilst words referring to Beowulf himself (ic and min) do not. The same imperative seems to lie behind Beowulf’s assertion that he set off to slay Grendel’s mother (presented as another tit-for-tat killing, after her slaughter of Æschere) after being begged in Hygelac’s name (literally ‘on your life’: ðine life, line 2131b) to act; there is nothing comparable in Hrothgar’s own speech (lines 1321–82) to support it.

Hrothgar does, however, promise Beowulf a reward in the form of treasure, as he had done in the case of his killing of Grendel (swa ic ær dyde, line 1381b), and it is striking the number of times to which Beowulf returns to the subject of treasure in his speech to Hygelac, when in Denmark he has seemed wholly unconcerned with material gain. So, Beowulf tells Hygelac that Hrothgar ‘paid [him] well in decorated gold and many treasures’ (fættan golde fela leanode, manegum maðmum, lines 2102–3a) for killing Grendel, ‘promised [him] a reward’ for undertaking his expedition against Grendel’s mother (he me mede gehet, line 2134b), and later fulfilled his promise (in an echo of the bounty he received after slaying Grendel), when ‘he gave [him] in return a multitude of treasures’ (eft gesealde maðma menigeo, lines 2142b–2143a). Likewise, the whole closing section of Beowulf’s speech to Hygelac, which begins in praise of Hrothgar, again focuses on the treasure that Beowulf has brought (lines 2144–51):79

78 An implicit contrast between the suffering Danes and the (now) honoured Geats seems indicated by the repetition of the element leod- in lines 2093b and 2095b.

79 The word maðnas in line 2146b has been supplied; the manuscript is defective at this point; likewise, minne has to be completed in line 2147b.
them in good will. I am still wholly dependent on you for my joys; I have few chief kinsmen except you, Hygelac.’

So this long speech, which begins with Hygelac (dryhten Higelac, line 2000b), ends too with mention of his name (Hygelac, ðec).

There follows a highly ritualised exchange of gifts, depicted in great detail (lines 2152–99), and carefully marked off by chiastic repetition of introductory phrases (Het ða in beran . . . Hyrdic ic . . . Hyrdic ic . . . Het ða . . . in fetian, lines 2152a, 2163a, 2172a, and 2190).80 It is no surprise that the gifts which Beowulf presents to Hygelac match closely what he was himself given by Hrothgar for killing Grendel, although again we are given some supplementary detail here.

The four chief gifts bestowed by Hrothgar have earlier been carefully described (lines 1020–34), where they are said to consist of ‘Healfdene’s sword’ (brand Healfdenes, line 1020b), a ‘golden standard’ (segen gyldenne, line 1021), and ‘a helmet and mailcoat’ (helm on byrnan, line 1022b); it is surely the same set of weaponry that Beowulf passes on to Hygelac, described as ‘a boar-headed standard, a helmet towering in battle, a grey mail-coat, a splendid war-sword’ (eofor heafod segn, headosteapne helm, hare byrnan, guðsweord geatolic, lines 2152b–2154a). We learn that the golden standard has a boar at its head, and, in further elaboration (lines 2155–62), that the mailcoat is that of Hrothgar’s elder brother, Heorogar, who had refused to present it to his own son, Heoroweard.

As a further reward to Beowulf for killing Grendel, Hrothgar had given him ‘eight horses’ (eahta mearas, line 1035b) one of which was wearing Hrothgar’s own war-saddle (lines 1037b–1042), whilst Wealhtheow, not to be outdone, had presented him with a number of baubles, including ‘the greatest of neck-rings (healsbeaga mæst, line 1195b).81 In his own gift-giving on his return to the land of the Geats, Beowulf gives Hygelac, in addition to the four golden treasures already described, ‘four horses’ (feower mearas, line 2163b), and he gives a further three (þrio wicg somod, line 2174b) to Hygd, Hygelac’s queen, in addition to ‘the neck-ring that Wealhtheow had given him’ (ðone healsbeah . . . ðone þe him Wealhteow geaf, lines 2172a–2173b); one assumes that, having given away seven of the eight horses with which he had been presented, Beowulf kept the one wearing Hrothgar’s war-saddle. What is striking in comparing these scenes of gift-giving in Denmark and the land of the Geats, separated by over a thousand lines, is the sheer extent of overlap: not only do the gifts Beowulf hands over correspond closely with what he received for killing Grendel (presumably he also retains the twelve further gifts he was given for dealing with Grendel’s mother, mentioned in passing by the poet in lines 1866–9), but there are numerous verbal echoes, not simply of the repeated ‘structuring’ phrases (Het ða in beran . . . Het ða eorla hleo in fetian, lines 2152a and 2190: cf. Heht ða eorla hleo . . . on flet teon, in under eoderas; Hyrdic ic . . . Hyrdic ic, lines 2163a and 2172a: cf. gefrægn ic, line 1027a), but also other specific diction (he him est geteah meara ond maðma, lines 2165b–2166a: cf. onweald geteah wicga ond wæpna . . . mearam ond madmum, lines 1044b–1045a and 1048a). Like-

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81 For more on the significance of this ring, see below, pp. 114–16.
wise, it is striking that, just as there is a change of metre to predominantly long lines to mark out the arrival into the hall of Wealhtheow before she bestows on Beowulf the neck-ring (lines 1162b–1168), so too there is a similar change of metre when the neck-ring is reintroduced (lines 2171–2).\(^82\) In short, the return to Geatland marks a further change in tempo of the speech-patterning, and prepares the audience for the quite different part that speeches play in Part II of the poem. At Hrothgar’s court, the patterned trading of words provides the staple currency of courtly life, while at Hygelac’s court it is the giving of gifts and reporting of deeds that seems paramount. As we shall see, a still different pattern prevails at the court of King Beowulf, where precious words are spent, but never exchanged.

Famous last words: dramatic monologues and the dragon-episode

If the total lack of response to Wealhtheow in Heorot seems disturbing precisely because of the careful choreography of the other speeches in Part I of the poem, and if exchanging words is made secondary to the exchange of gifts on Beowulf’s return home, then pouring out words into unresponsive emptiness is simply the norm in Part II of *Beowulf*. It has often been noted that the whole of the dragon-episode has a different feel from the events depicted in Denmark, and that the dragon-fight itself is of a different stamp.\(^83\) The bleakness of tone is set right from the start, with a speech from an anonymous ‘last survivor’ of a noble race (*æþelan cynnes*, line 2234b), mourning in a monologue the loss of his people (lines 2247–66):\(^84\)

> ‘Heald þu nu, hruse, nu hæleð ne mostan, eorla æhte. Hwæt, hyt ær on ðe gode begeaton. Guððeáð fornarn, feorhbealo fresce, fyra gehwylcne leoda minra, þara ðe þis lif ofgeaf, gesawon seledream. Nah hwa sweord wege oððe feormie ðæted wæge,

\(^{82}\) See further above, p. 67.


\(^{84}\) The manuscript reads *mæstan* at 2247b, *fyrena* at 2250b, *pana de þis ofgeaf* at 2251b, and *seoc* at 2254b; *feormie* has been supplied in line 2253a: the manuscript reads *f. . . .*
‘Hold now, earth, what now warriors cannot, the possessions of men. Indeed, good men obtained it once from you; battle-death, dread mortal harm, has carried off every man of my people who have given up this life: they have seen the last of the joy of the hall. There is no one to carry the sword, or bear forth the plated cup, the precious drinking vessel; the trusty troop has gone elsewhere. The hard helmet, gold-adorned, must be bereft of its plated decorations; the burnishers sleep, who ought to polish the battle-masks; and also the mail-coat, which in battle endured the cut of iron above the clash of shields, decays after the warrior; the mail-shirt’s ring cannot journey widely behind the war-leader, by the warriors’ side. There is no joy from the harp, no delight from the musical instrument, nor does the fine hawk fly through the hall, nor the swift steed stamp the courtyard. Terrible death has sent forth many of the living race.’

The artful nature of this set-piece speech is clear from the sheer number of effects used: rhyme (herepad . . . gebad, line 2258), continued alliteration (gebad . . . borda gebræc bite . . . brosnað . . . beorne . . . byrnan, lines 2258b–2260), paronomasia (wege . . . wege, lines 2252b and 2253b), and anaphora (Næs . . . ne . . . ne, lines 2262b–2264), all contained within an envelope pattern (Guðdeað . . . feorhbealo . . . Bealocwealm . . . feorh cynna, lines 2249b–2266a). Whether or not one accepts Gale Owen-Crocker’s argument that what is described here is, in effect, a funeral, there is no mistaking the melancholy tone: the last survivor speaks to no one, is heard by no one, and answer came there none.

Within little more than a hundred and fifty lines, and some three hundred years later, we are back at the same scene, witnessing Beowulf’s final speech before facing the dragon. Beowulf’s previous boasts before battle were both relatively brief: eleven lines before fighting Grendel (lines 677–87) and eighteen before facing Grendel’s mother (lines 1474–91). Now, prior to his last battle, a very different Beowulf utters a very different speech of no fewer than 107
Those who wish to see in Beowulf a type of Christ find much significance in his final journey to meet the dragon, as Beowulf proceeds, one of twelve men (twelfa sum, line 2401a), with the thief thirteenth, tagging along unwillingly to guide the way (lines 2406–13a). Certainly, Beowulf experiences a moment of personal reflection before his trial which resembles Christ’s anguish at Gethsemane (lines 2417–24):24

Then the attack-hardened king, the gold-friend of the Geats, sat on the headland, bid good luck to his hearth-companions. His heart was sad, restless and ready for death, the fate immeasureably close that had to overtake the aged one, seek out the soul’s hoard, divide asunder the life from the body; not for long after that was the prince’s life enclosed in flesh.

Noteworthy here is the use of the phrase ‘seek out the soul’s hoard’ (secean sawle hord, line 2422a), since earlier in the poem the parallel phrase ‘seek out the soul’ (sawle secan, line 801a) has been used of those intending (without result) to kill Grendel; the use of the term ‘hoard’ in this context, as Beowulf sets out to kill the dragon and plunder its hoard, seems distinctly loaded. It may also be the case that in employing the phrase ‘divide asunder the life from the body’ (sundur gedælan lif wið lice, lines 2422b–2423a), the poet may be recalling the parallel expression, used of Grendel’s frustrated murderous design, that he ‘intended that he should divide . . . the life from the body of every single one of them’ (mynte þæt he gedælde . . . anra gehwylces lif wið lice, lines 731a–733a). In Beowulf’s case, fate and the dragon finally accomplish what Grendel could not.

At all events, the upshot of Beowulf’s melancholy reverie is a lengthy speech of over one hundred lines (lines 2426–537, with brief interruptions at lines 2510–11a and 2516–18a), in which he reviews his past life. The speech begins with an assertion about his past conflicts which matches closely what the poet himself has twice recently said (lines 2426–7):

‘Fela ic on giogoðe guðraesa genæs, orleghwila; þæt eall gemon.’

88 See Table IV above, pp. 206–7.
89 See above, pp. 147–9.
90 See above, p. 148.
92 Compare lines 2349b–2351a (fordon he ær fela nearo neðende niða gediged, hildehlemma) and 2397–9a (Swa he niða gehwane genesen hæfde sliðra geslyhta, sunu Ecgðiowes, ellenweorca).
Beowulf begins by reviewing his own life, but soon focuses instead on the calamities that befell old King Hræthel of the Geats, who saw one son kill another and could do nothing about it. Beowulf follows up his musings on the sufferings of Hræthel by highlighting the case of how, after Hræthel died, another aged king, this time Ongentheow the Swede, died attempting to exact vengeance for an attack upon him by the Geats, led by Hæthcyn and Hygelac. Ironically, Hæthcyn the fratricide is himself avenged by his other brother, Hygelac, in a passage which offers the first of several glimpses in the poem of the complex feuding that characterises the wars between the Swedes and the Geats (lines 2472–89). Although Hygelac is given the credit for the slaying of Ongentheow, the actual deed was performed by a hitherto unknown warrior, Eofor, in a vividly described killing, the savagery of which well suits a man whose name means ‘boar’ (lines 2484–9).

‘Þa ic on morgne gefrægn mæg oðerne
billes ecgum on bonan stælan,
þær Ongenþeow Eofores niosað –
guðhelm toglad, gomela Scylfing
hreas heoroblac; hond gemunde
fæhðo genoge, feorhsweng ne ofteah.’

[‘Then I heard that in the morning one kinsman took vengeance from the other’s slayer with the edge of a sword, when Ongentheow encounters Eofor; the war-helmet split, the aged Scylfing fell, pale from battle: the hand remembered many hostile deeds, it did not hold back from the deadly blow.’]

The violence of the aged king’s death is dealt with in some detail; the notion that Eofor’s hand ‘did not hold back from the deadly blow’ echoes what the poet has already said, nearly a thousand lines earlier, about Beowulf’s own first blow against Grendel’s mother (hond sweng ne ofteah, line 1520b). Beowulf follows his account of Ongentheow’s death with a detailed discussion of his relationship with Hygelac (lines 2490–509):
ana on orde, ond swa to aldre sceall
sæcce fremman, þenden þis sword þolað,
þæt mec ær ond sið oft gelæste,
syððan ic for dugeðum Dæghrefne wearð
to handbonan, Huga cempan;
nalles he ða frætwe Frescyninge,
breostweorðunge, bringan moste,
ac in campe gecrong cumbles hyrde,
æþeling on elne; ne wæs ecg bona,
ac him hildegrap heortan wylmas,
banhus gebræc. Nu sceall billes ecg,
hond ond heard sweord, ymb hord wigan.'

['I repaid him in battle for those treasures which he gave me, as was
granted me with my bright sword; he presented me with land, a
dwelling, the joys of a home. There was no necessity for him, that he
need seek from the Gifthas, or the Spear-Danes, or in Sweden for a
worse warrior, obtain at a price. I always wanted to be before him
among the foot-soldiers, alone in the forefront, and so I shall throughout
my life do battle, while this sword lasts, which has often, in the early
days and lately, sustained me since the time when before the hosts I
became the hand-slayer of Dæghrefn, the champion of the Hugas. Not at
all was he permitted to bring back the accoutrements, breast-adorn-
ments, to the Frisian king, but he fell on the battle-field, the stan-
dard-bearer, the prince in valour; no sword was his slayer, but a
battle-grip shattered the surgings of his heart, his bone-house. Now
must a weapon’s edge, hand and hard sword contend for the hoard.]

The opening of this section of Beowulf’s speech focuses attention on the mutual
give and take which is the hallmark of heroic commerce, stressed by no fewer
that four terms for giving in three lines (sealde geald...gifeðe...forgeaf, lines
2490b–2492) of which the first two, the subjects of which are Hygelac and
Beowulf respectively, are highlighted by both contiguity and rhyme across a
line-break. Although Beowulf mentions first of all that he received ‘treasures’
(maðmas, line 2490a) from Hygelac, he quickly goes on to assert through repeti-
tion that what he really gained was a home (lond...eard, edelwyn, lines
2492b–2493a). There is a striking emphasis here on Beowulf’s sword (lines
2492a, 2499b, 2505b, 2508b and 2509a), as well as on his own raw
hand-strength (lines 2502a, 2507a and 2509a), an emphasis (and a construction)
which echoes closely his earlier comments about dealing with the creatures who
assailed him in his contest with Breca (lines 553b–558):

‘Me to grunde teah
fah feondscaða, fæste hæfde
grim on grape; hwæþre me gyfæþe wearð
þæt ic aglæcan orde gereæhte,
hildebille; heaþoporæs fornam
mihtig meredeor þurh mine hand.’

97 See above, pp. 61–9.
[‘A guilty aggressive ravager dragged me to the bottom, grim in its grip, and yet it was granted to me that I should pierce with my point the awesome assailant, with my war-sword; the rush of battle took off the mighty sea-creature through my hand.’]

Here again, Beowulf’s victory is seen as a combination of swordsmanship and sheer strength, much as was his triumph against Grendel’s mother. The fact that just before he faces the dragon Beowulf should mention his defeat of Dæghrefn, apparently without the aid of a sword, would again seem to echo his triumphant earlier contest with Grendel.98

In breaking up Beowulf’s speech before facing the dragon (lines 2510–11a and 2516–18a), the poet effectively twice stresses that this is the ‘last time’ he shall make such a speech (niehstan side, line 2511a; hindeman side, line 2517b); but these interjections by the poet also serve to highlight the wider structure of the speech as a whole. At its beginning, Beowulf had emphasised the depth of his experience (Fela ic on gioguðe guðraesas genæs, orleghwila; ic þæt eall gemon, lines 2426–7), and so too after the first of the poet’s interruptions does he return to that theme (lines 2511b–2515):99

‘Ic geneðde fela
guða on geogoðe;  gyt ic wylle,
frod folces weard,  feðhe secan,
mærðum fremman,  gif mec se mansceaða
of eorðsele  ut gesceð.’2515

[‘I endured many battles in my youth; as an experienced guardian of my people I still want to seek hostile encounters, perform gloriously, if that wicked ravager comes to me out of the earth-hall.’]

Here, however, Beowulf turns quickly from the past to the future, and expresses a firm resolve, commencing immediately after the second of the poet’s interruptions, and going on to the end of the speech (lines 2518b–2537):100

‘Nolde ic sweord beran,
wæpen to wyrme,  gif ic wiste hu
wið dam aglæcean  elles meahte
gylpe wiðgripæn,  swa ic gio wið Grendle dyde.
Ac ic ðær heaðufyres  hates wene,
oreðes ond attres;  forðon ic me on haf
bord ond byrnan.  Nelle ic beorges weard
oferfleon fotes trem,  ac unc furður sceal
woerðan æt wealle,  swa unc wyrd geteoð,
metod manna gehwæs.  Ic eom on mode from
þæt ic wið þone guðflogan  gylp ofersitte.

98 See above, p. 121.
99 Following Mitchell and Robinson, ed., Beowulf, p. 137, I take mærðum in line 2514a as an adverbial dative; other editors simply emend to mæðu (‘glorious deeds’).
100 The manuscript reads reðes & hattres at line 2523a; furður is missing in line 2525b; and wat appears for þæt in line 2534a. On the phrase oreðes ond attres, see Cook, ‘Aldhelm and the Source of Beowulf 2523’.
For a speech expressing positive resolve, there are a striking number of negative expressions here (Nolde...Nelle...Nis, lines 2518b, 2524b, and 2532b). Moreover, the impression of Beowulf’s otherness is underlined by the deliberate way he distinguishes himself (and the dragon) from the rest: in a portion of the speech remarkable for its first-person singular references (lines 2518b, 2519b, 2521b, 2522a, 2523b (twice), 2524b, 2527b, 2528a, 2533b, and 2535b),\(^{101}\) Beowulf aligns himself with the dragon through the use of the dual form three times (lines 2525b and 2526b), and uses second-person plural forms to indicate his men (lines 2532b and 2537b). Beowulf’s closing vow to gain the treasure or die in the attempt is typical of the (equally unfulfilled) vows made by him earlier in the poem:\(^{102}\) characteristically, he manages to do both.

The poet’s own comment on Beowulf’s actions stresses again the protective measures that he has undertaken (lines 2538–41):

\[
\text{Aras ða bi ronde rof oretta,} \\
\text{heard under helme, hiorosercean bær} \\
\text{under stancleofu, strengo getruwode} \\
\text{anes mannes. Ne bið swyle earges sið.}
\]

[Then the bold warrior arose by his shield, hard under his helmet, he bore his battle-shirt under the stone cliffs, put his faith in the strength of a single man: such is not the coward’s way.]

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\(^{101}\) On Beowulf’s use of the first-person elsewhere in the poem, see above, p. 213.

\(^{102}\) See above, pp. 195 and 215.
By successively focusing on Beowulf’s defensive arrangements (shield, helmet, and corselet) the poet effectively foreshadows the fact that Beowulf is to face the fiercest attack of his life.\(^\text{103}\) The poet’s remark that for Beowulf to put his faith in his own sole strength is not the mark of the coward would hardly seem appropriate were his opponent simply another man: we have already been told (twice) that Beowulf was the strongest man alive (lines 196–7 and 789–90). In his battles against superhuman creatures, however, Beowulf’s (rightly placed) faith in his own might has already been expressed in very similar terms (and with similarly gnomic authorial endorsement); when Unferth’s sword fails him against Grendel’s mother, Beowulf is (quite literally) thrown back on his own resources (lines 1529–36):

\[Eft \text{ wæs anræd, } \text{nalas elnes læt, mærða gemyndig } \text{mæg Hylaces.} \]

\[Wearp ða wundenmæl } \text{wrættum gebunden yrre oretta, } \text{þæt hit on eorðan læg, stið ond stylecg; } \text{strenge getruwode, mundgripe mægenes. } \text{Swa sceal man don, þonne he æt guðe } \text{gegan þenceð longsumme lof, } \text{na ymb his lif cearað.} \]

[Once again he was resolute, in no way slack in courage, mindful of great deeds, Hygelac’s kinsman. He cast away the patterned weapon, inlaid with ornaments, the angry warrior, so that it lay on the ground, hard and steel-edged; he put his faith in his strength, his hand-grip of might. So ought a man to do when he thinks to gain lasting fame in battle: he will not care about his life.]

As he advances towards the dragon, however, Beowulf is not the only one of the protagonists to have put his faith in his defensive protection and martial ability; the poet has already noted ominously that a similar (and ultimately similarly misplaced) confidence is shared by the dragon itself (lines 2321–3):

\[Hæfde landwara } \text{lige befangen, bæle ond bronde, } \text{beorges getruwode, wiges ond wealles; } \text{him seo wen geleah.} \]

[It had encircled the nation’s people in flame, with fire and burning: it trusted in its barrow, its fighting-power and fortification; that hope deceived it.]

Once more, Beowulf and his final foe are linked, before they have even encountered one another. As Beowulf advances, the ominous collocation of surging fire that marked out the dwelling of Grendel and his mother is repeated at the scene of the dragon’s lair (lines 2542–9):\(^\text{104}\)

\[Geseah ða be wealle } \text{se ðe worna fela, gumcystum god, guða gedigde,} \]

\(^\text{103}\) Cf. above, pp. 65–6.
\(^\text{104}\) The manuscript reads \textit{stodan} at line 2545a, presumably because of a missing nasal suspension.
hildehlemma, þonne hnitan fēðan,
stondan stanbogan, stream ut þonan
brecan of beorge. Wæs þære burnan wælm
heāðofyrum hat; ne meahte horde neah
unbyrnende ænige hwile
deeper gedygan for dracan lege.

[He who, fine in his manly virtues, had endured a great number of battles, war-clamours, when the foot-troops clashed, saw by the wall a stone arch stand, and a stream break out from the mountain-side there. The bubbling of that stream was hot with deadly fires; he could not without burning endure the depths near the hoard for any length of time, because of the dragon’s flame.]

Wordplay underlines the extent to which the fiery surges of the dragon’s flame resemble streams of mountain water (burnan . . . unbyrnende, lines 2546b and 2548a), and, just as with the monster-mere, the combination of fire and water may well suggest the familiar imagery of Doomsday. Certainly, just as Grendel is roused by the sound of a human voice, so too is the dragon enraged by Beowulf’s battle-cry (lines 2550–6a); once again references to Beowulf’s shield are common in the passage that describes the first encounter between Beowulf and the dragon (lines 2559–75a):  

Biorn under beorge bordrand onswaf
wið ðam gryregieste, Geata dryhten;
ða wæs hringbogan heorte Gefyrd
sæce to seceanne. Swoerd ær gebraed
god guðcyning, gomele lafe,
egcum ungleaw; æghwæðrum wæs
bealohycgendra broga fram oðrum.
Stiðmod gestod wið steapne rone
winia bealdor, ða se wyrm gebeah
snude tosomne; he on searwum bad.
Gewat ða byrnende gebogen scriðan,
to gescipe scyndan. Scyld wel gebearg
life ond lice læssan hwile
mærum þodne þonne his myne sohte,
dær he þy fyrste, forman dogore
wealdan moste swa him wyrd ne gescraf
hrōd æt hilde.

[The warrior, lord of the Geats, swung the rim of his shield under the barrow against that dreadful stranger; then was the heart of the coiled creature aroused to seek out battle. The good war-king had drawn the ancient heirloom, dull of edge; for each of those ones intent on destruction, there was horror of the other. The lord of the dear people stood resolute by his towering shield as the dragon swiftly coiled together; he waited in his armour. Then it came, burning and coiled, gliding swiftly

106 For the sense ‘dull of edge’ for ecgum ungleaw at line 2564a, see Mitchell and Robinson, ed., Beowulf; p. 138; see too Kiernan, ‘Beowulf’ and the ‘Beowulf’-Manuscript, pp. 206–8.
to its fate. The shield protected life and limb less well than his purpose
required when on that occasion for the first time he had to battle when
fate had not decreed him the triumph in the fray.]

The whole passage builds on the same restricted series of sounds (b, s, and sc
[pronounced ‘sh’]), brilliantly brought together in the chilling description of the
rushing serpent (lines 2569–70). There is a sense that, for Beowulf, time is
running out: not only does his shield not protect him for as long as he intends
(lines 2570b–2572), but so too his sword ‘bit less strongly than the mighty king
required, driven to dire straits’ (bat unswiðor þonne his ðiodcyning þearfe
haefde, bysigum gebæded, lines 2578b–2580a). Their mutual horror again
provides a link between Beowulf and the dragon (lines 2564b–2565), and the
poet represents this first phase of their encounter as essentially a battle between
equals: after Beowulf strikes his first (ineffective) sword-blow, the dragon retali-
ates in kind (lines 2580b–2583a):

Þa wæs beorges weard
æfter heaðuswenge on hreoum mode,
wearp wælfyre; wide sprungon
hildeleoman.
[Then the mound’s guardian following the aggressive blow became
enraged in his heart, cast out murderous fire, battle-flames sprang
widely.]

The poet’s choice of the term ‘battle-flames’ (hildeleoman, line 2583a) here is
exquisite; elsewhere it and related terms are common kennings for ‘sword’ (as at
line 1143b).107 By sandwiching the word between two (rhyming) references to
the failure of Beowulf’s own sword (sio ecg gewac . . . guðbill geswac, lines
2577b and 2584b), and by using the term in its literal rather than metaphorical
sense, the poet makes of the dragon an almost human protagonist: just as
warriors wield their swords like flames, so too does the dragon wield its flames
like swords. At all events, we are clearly given to understand that Beowulf is
beaten back in the first attack, and has already failed to live up to his stated aim
that he ‘will not flee away from the mountain’s guardian the space of a foot’
(Nelle ic beorges weard oferfeon fotes trem, lines 2524b–2525a);108 already this
small defeat is offered as a foretaste of the death that is to come (lines
2586b–2591a):109

Ne wæs þæt eðe sið,
þæt se mæra maga Ecgðeowes
grundwong þone ofgyfan wolde;

107 See further above, pp. 69–70.
108 It is worth noting that the poet explicitly links the first attack of the dragon with Beowulf’s earlier
expressed intention through the use of the term ‘mountain’s guardian’ (beorges weard, line 2580b),
which has hitherto only been used by Beowulf to express his determination not to retreat (beorges
weard, line 2524b).
109 The word offer has been supplied in line 2589a, in line with most editions; the manuscript simply
reads sceolde willan.
sceolde ofer willan  wic eardian
elles hwergen,  swa sceal æghwyle mon
alætan lændagas.

[It was no easy trip for the famous kinsman of Ecgtheow to want to give
up that piece of ground; he had against his will to inhabit a
dwelling-place elsewhere: so must every man abandon his transitory
days.]

Once again, Beowulf and his dragon are inextricably linked, as they are both
described as ‘awesome assailants’ (*aglæcean*, line 2592a) squaring up for a
second attack.\(^{110}\) Beowulf’s men all flee away to the woods (lines 2596–9a),
except one who, we infer, is related to Beowulf (lines 2599b–2601):

Hiora in anum weoll
sefa wið sorgum;  sibb æfre ne mæg
wiht onwendan  þam ðe wel þenceð.

[In one of them his spirit surged with sorrows; nothing can ever deflect
the call of kinship for one who thinks properly.]

With such a gnomic sentiment fitt XXXV ends, and Wiglaf, a new and critical
voice, is (somewhat portentously) introduced.\(^{111}\) His speeches, which form part
of the focus of the next chapter,\(^{112}\) will be characterised by a clear-sightedness
and perspective hitherto denied the other characters in *Beowulf*. Wiglaf
comments freely on both Beowulf and his people in an openly analytical
fashion, and as such can be said to speak not only for the poet, but for us.

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110 On the use of the term, see above, pp. 90 and 189.
111 On the sonorous introduction granted Wiglaf, see above, pp. 73–4.
112 See below, pp. 261–3.
Beowulf: Beyond Criticism?

‘Beowulf’ and the limits of human knowledge

According to Brigid Brophy, writing in 1967, first on the list (albeit for reasons of chronology) of dispensable texts in the canon of English literature was Beowulf. What as early as 1705 Humfrey Wanley had called ‘an outstanding example of Anglo-Saxon poetry’ (Poeseos Anglo-Saxonicae egregium exemplum) is unkindly described: ‘Boring and unattractive as a story, pointlessly bloodthirsty but – we are always told – fundamentally christian, Beowulf is a fine example of primitive non-art. Admiring comment on its poetry is about as relevant as praise for the architecture of Stonehenge.’ Philip Larkin was equally scathing, if more pithy, writing to Kingsley Amis in 1942, after the latter had just joined the army: ‘Life is a fanged monster, sonny, that lies in wait for you . . . Sometimes I think of Beowulf and The Wanderer. Oh boo hoo. You lucky man to be in the army away from it all.’

But if some modern readers have failed to be impressed by Beowulf, it is equally clear that the poet himself is far from universally positive about the characters he has created, producing a perhaps surprising number of apparently critical or at least questionable comments, both by and of a whole range of individuals. Special pleading and even skilful emendation may do no real service to the poet and his piece. Certainly the poet often seems to circumscribe and undercut his creations, putting into sharp focus the limits of their shared mortality and the boundaries of all human knowledge. The closing words of the first (unnumbered) fitt stress as much, saying of the final destination of the departing Scyld Scefing (lines 50b–52):

Men ne cunnon
secgan to sóðe,  selerædende,
 hæleð under heofenum,  hwa þæm hlæste onfeng.
[Men cannot say for sure, hall-counsellors, warriors under the heavens, who received that load.]

1 Brophy, Fifty Works, pp. 1–2.
3 Brophy, Fifty Works, p. 1.
4 Larkin, Selected Letters, p. 39.
5 The manuscript reads sele raedenne at line 51b, but the emendation is of a common type; see above, pp. 42 and 45.
This is but the first occasion on which the knowledge of the Danes (and, in this case, the wider audience also) is depicted as being sadly delimited in precisely parallel terms. Just as no one knows Scyld’s ultimate fate, so too no one knows where creatures like Grendel venture in their wanderings (men ne cunnon, line 162b), nor whether Grendel has a father (no hie fæder cunnon, line 1355b). More seriously, the Danes go to sleep insensible of the sorrow of their sad mortal fate at Grendel’s hands (sorge ne cuðon, wonsceaft wera, lines 119b–120a), and in their resultant panic fall into devilish ways, since they are ignorant of (the true) God (lines 180b–188):⁶

Metod hie ne cuþon, 180

dæda Demend, ne wiston hie Drihten God,
ne hie huru heofena Helm herian ne cuþon,
wulldres Waldend. Wa bið þæm þe sceal
þurh sliðne nið sawle bescufan
ín fyres fæþm, frosre ne wenan,
white gewendan; wel bið þæm þe mot
aefter deaðdæge drihten secean
ond to fæder fæþmum freðo wilnian.

[They did not know the Creator, the Judge of Deeds, nor did they recognise the Lord God, nor truly did they know how to praise the Protector of the Heavens, the Ruler of Glory. It shall be woe for the one who must through cruel enmity thrust his soul into the fire’s embrace, not hope for comfort, or any change; it shall be well for the one who may seek the Lord after his death-day, and ask for protection in the father’s embrace.]

Nor do the Danes ever learn. In what is evidently a deliberate echo of the earlier passage, we are later told how, even after the defeat of Grendel, the Danes are still in the dark (as it were), ignorant of the incipient arrival of his avenging mother (wyrd ne cuþon, geasceaft grimme, line 1233). On both occasions the Danes feast in empty celebration, before going to a sleep from which some will never arise.⁷

The utter helplessness and impotence of the Danes in the face of Grendel’s predations are stressed twice in practically identical terms before Beowulf himself is introduced; we are told that (lines 133b–134a and 191b–192a):

wæs þæt gewin to strang,
lað ond longsum

. . .

wæs þæt gewin to swyð,
laþ ond longsum.

[That struggle was too strong, hateful and longlasting . . . that struggle was too great, hateful and longlasting.]

⁶ These are famously among the lines that caused Tolkien such difficulty; see his ‘The Monsters and the Critics’, pp. 294–5, and see further above, pp. 152–3.

⁷ For the poet’s use of sleep as a metaphor in this and similar contexts, see, for example, Kavros, ‘Swefan æfter symble: the Feast-Sleep Theme in Beowulf’; McFadden, ‘Sleeping after the Feast’.
But if Grendel is beyond the power and comprehension of the Danes, the lines which introduce the (as yet unnamed) hero Beowulf provide an opportunity for the poet to make clear how much his hero outstrips other men (lines 194–8a):

Þæt fram ham gefrægn Higelaces þegn,
god mid Geatum, Grendles dæda;
se wæs moncynees mægnes strengest
on þæm dæge ðysses lifes,
aþele ond eacen.

[Hygelac’s thegn, a good man among the Geats, learned about Grendel’s deeds from home; he was of men the strongest in might on that day of this life, noble and vast.]

Beginning with a near-rhyme (gefrægn . . . þegn, line 194), these lines emphasise both Beowulf’s nobility and his pre-eminence; the use of the term ‘vast’ (eacen, line 198a) is particularly interesting in this context, since elsewhere in the poem the term is used only of the giant sword from the monster mere (lines 1663a [ealdsweord eacen] and 2140a [eacnum ecgum]), the monster mere itself (eacne eardas, line 1621a), the dragon (eacencraeftig, line 2280a), and the dragon’s cursed treasure (eacencraeftig, line 3051b). Still more striking, however, is the way in which the poet effectively circumscribes Beowulf’s power both in time and sphere of influence through alliteration of elements which do not normally carry either stress or alliteration: he was the strongest on that day of this life.9 The poet repeats the phrase twice more in the battle between Beowulf and Grendel, using it once of each protagonist (se þe manna wæs mægene strengest on þæm dæge ðysses lifes, lines 789–90 [Beowulf]; on ðæm dæge ðysses lifes, line 806 [Grendel]).10

Storm-clouds over Denmark: Ingeld, Hrothulf, and Unferth

But if the Danes are condemned for their impotent reliance on the tabernacles of idols,11 Beowulf himself is measured circumspectly sub specie aeternitatis.12 A similar technique is used to undercut Hrothgar at the height of his success, after having built Heorot and, in accordance with approved practice, liberally distribut ed treasure. Having praised the Danish king the poet characteristically glances ahead, towards the tragic end of Hrothgar’s beloved hall (lines 80–5):13

8 On rhyme in Beowulf, see above, pp. 61–9; a similar use of end-rhyme between half-lines is found in line 2258 (herepad . . . gebad).
9 On the poet’s use of the phrase, see in particular Frank, ‘The Beowulf Poet’s Sense of History’, p. 54.
10 On the use of the variant phrase mægene strengest in line 789b, see above, p. 55.
12 A similar technique is used to emphasise a contrast between this world and the next by the poets of The Wanderer on the one hand (line 58: Forþon ic gelence ne mæg geond þas woruld [my emphasis]) and Deor on the other (line 31: Mæg þonne geþencan þæt geond þas woruld [my emphasis]); indeed, the closely parallel phrasing of these last two lines (both in the Exeter Book) may perhaps indicate some kind of connection. See further Orchard, ‘Re-reading The Wanderer’, pp. 18–19.
13 In fact, the manuscript reads secg hete at line 84a, almost always emended to se eghete through an assumption of haplography (on which see above, pp. 43–6). Elsewhere in the poem, however, the poet
He beot ne aleh, beagas dælde, 80
sinc æt symle. Sele hlifade,
heah ond horngeap, heaðowylma bad,
læðan liges; ne wæs hit lenge þa gen
þæt se ecghete alþumsweorum,
æfter wælniðe waencan scolde. 85

[He did not break his vow: he distributed rings, treasure at the banquet. The hall towered, high and wide-gabled, it awaited the hostile surges of the hateful flame; the time was not yet at hand that the sword-hatred between father-in-law and son-in-law should awaken after deadly hatred.]

Even when the paint is barely dry on this ‘best of houses’ (*husa selest*, lines 146, 285, 658, and 935; *foremærrost . . . receda*, lines 309–10a; *reced selesta*, line 412), we are told how it will perish as a result of feuding between in-laws, namely Hrothgar and his future son-in-law Ingeld; the term chosen to depict the feuding parties (*alþumsweorum*, line 84) has a particularly ironic ring following close on the assertion that Hrothgar himself ‘did not break his vow’ (*beot ne aleh*, line 80). If we flash forward to Beowulf’s own prophetic account of this feud, we find strikingly parallel terms used (lines 2063–9a): 16

‘Þonne bioð abrocene on ba healfe
aðsweorð eorla; syððan Ingelde
weallað wælniðas, ond him wiflufan
æfter cearwælum colran weorðað.
þy ic Heaðobeardna hyldo ne telge,
dryhtsibbe dæl Denum unfaecline,
freondsceipe fæstne.’

[‘Then is broken on both sides the oath-swearing of men; afterwards for Ingeld deadly hatred wells up, and love of his wife grows cold after the surgings of care. For that reason I do not reckon the loyalty of the Heathobards, their portion of the marriage-peace, without danger for the Danes, their friendship firm.’]

Here, as elsewhere, alliteration is used in an artful manner, linking key concepts in the final two lines of the tale proper (2065–6), before Beowulf’s concluding analysis: continued alliteration (*weallað wælniðas . . . wiflufan . . .*

seems to engage in wordplay on the homograph *secg* (meaning both ‘man’ and ‘sword’), as well as on the soundplay between *secg* (meaning ‘man’) and *ecg* (meaning ‘sword’); see further above, pp. 76 and 185–6. Likewise, the manuscript actually reads *afum swerian* at line 84b; Klaeber’s suggestion, that ‘a scribe blundered, having in mind að [‘oath’] and swerian [‘to swear’] (Beowulf, p. 130), is the more intriguing given the putative connection with *adsweord* (‘oath-swearing’, line 2064a) noted below. One is tempted to suggest a deliberate pun on the part of the poet. 14 Cf. Eliason, ‘The Burning of Heorot’.

15 For useful commentary on this passage, see too Shippey, Beowulf, pp. 29–30.

16 The manuscript clearly reads *að sveorð* at 2064a, but given the common confusion of *d* for *ð* (and *vice versa*: see further above, pp. 42–6), several editors emend to *adsweord*; in any case, an oath that is broken is clearly what is intended.

17 On the Beowulf-poet’s artful use of alliteration, see further above, pp. 61–9.
cearwælum (cearowælum colran weorðað), cross-alliteration (cearowælum colran weorðað), and paronomasia (weall- / wæl- / wælm-) all play their part, and Ingeld’s shifting emotions, from ‘love of his wife’ to ‘deadly hatred’, are encapsulated in a single line. Still more significantly, the poet puts into Beowulf’s mouth the otherwise unattested noun aðsweord (‘oath-swearing’, line 2064a) to signify the bonds that link Ingeld to Hrothgar, and which rupture into ‘deadly hatred’ (wælniðas, line 2065a), in a clear echo of the poet’s own predictions of the fate of Heorot almost 2,000 lines earlier. Then, the poet had predicted a later stage of the ongoing feud, when Ingeld will attack Hrothgar in his hall and set Heorot ablaze; the use of the unusual term abumsweorum (‘father-in-law and son-in-law’, line 84b), later echoed in aðsweord (‘oath-swearing’, line 2064a), and of the poetic compound wælniðe (‘deadly hatred’, line 85a), which does not occur in the poem again until line 2065a (wælniðas), points to a deliberate connection.

Certainly, Beowulf extrapolates from his brief acquaintance with Freawaru and his patchy knowledge of her forthcoming wedding-arrangements a vivid and depressing picture of problems ahead. We have already seen from his earlier dealings with Unferth that Beowulf is no slouch at speechifying,18 and in this section of his report he pulls out all the stops (lines 2032–56):19

‘Mæg þæs þonne ofþyncan ðeodne Heaðobeardna
ond þegna gehwam þara leoda,
þonne he mid fæmnan on flett gað
dryhtbearna Dena, duguða biwenede.

On him gladiað gomelra lafe,
heard ond hringmæl Heaðabeardna gestreon
þenden hie ðam wæpnnum wealdan moston,
oððæt hie forlæddan to ðam lindplegan
swæse gesiðas ond hyra sylfra feorh.

þonne cwīð æt beore se de beah gesyhð, eald æscwiga, se de eall geman,
garcwealm gumena him bið grim sefa,
onginneð geomormod geongum cempan
þurh hreðra gehygd higes cunnian,
wigbealu weccean, ond þæt word acwyþ
“Meaht ðu, min wine, mece gecnawan
þone þin fæder to gefeohhte bær
under heregriman hindeman síðe,
dyre iren, þær hyne Dene slogon,
weoldon wælstowe, syddan Widergyld læg,
aþet hæleþa hryre, hwate Seyldungas? Nu her þara banæa byre nathwylces
frætwum hremig on flet gað,
mordres gyldpeð, ond þone maðþum byreð,
þone þe ðu mid rihte raedan sceoldest.”’

18 For a detailed analysis of Beowulf’s contest of words with Unferth, see below, pp. 247–55.
19 The manuscript reads ðeoden at line 2032b and headdabearn at 2037b, but the emendations accepted here are commonplace. Cf. Smithers, ‘Four Cruces in Beowulf’, pp. 427–30.
That may cause resentment to the ruler of the Heathobards, and to each of the warriors of those peoples when he, the wedding-attendant of the Danes, steps onto the floor with the woman, when they are nobly entertained. On him there gleams ancient heirlooms, hard and ring-patterned, the treasures of the Heathobards while they were able to wield their weapons, until they led to destruction in that shield-play their beloved companions and their own lives. Then there will speak at the beer-drinking one who sees a precious object, an aged spear-warrior, who has recalled it all, the spear-slaying of men – his spirit is grim – sad at heart he begins through the thoughts of his mind to test the courage of a young fighter, to stir up war-malice; and speaks the following words: “My friend, can you recognise the sword that your father bore to the fray beneath his battle-mask the last time, the fine blade, when the Danes struck him down, controlled the battlefield once Withergyld lay dead, after the fall of heroes, those brave Danes? Now here the son of one of those killers, exulting in his trappings, steps onto the floor, boasts of the killing and carries the treasure which you by right should control.”

There are signs of considerable artistry here. The passage begins with repeated alliteration on þ (lines 2032–3) which lays stress on ‘those peoples’ (þara leoda, line 2033b), and the tension is built up through the use of an envelope pattern which delays the commencement of the speech of the ‘aged spear-warrior’ (cwið . . . acwyð, lines 2041a and 2046b) and thereby focuses attention on the psychological and emotional turmoil of the protagonists (geman . . . sefa . . . geomormod . . . hreðra gehygld higes cunnian); the fact that it is a ‘spear-warrior’ (æscwiga, line 2042a) who recalls ‘spear-slaying’ (garcwealm, line 2043a) echoes Beowulf’s earlier apprehension about the ‘killing-spear’ (bongar, line 2031a). The speech of this ‘aged spear-warrior’ is linked back to Beowulf’s own description through verbal repetition (on flett gæð, line 2034b; on flet gæð, line 2054b). Even the fact that the unnamed ‘aged spear-warrior’, in inciting the unnamed ‘young fighter’ should apparently allude to the death of the otherwise unknown Withergyld only underlines the rhetorical force of Beowulf’s words: although the name is attested elsewhere (notably as Withergield in Widsith, line 124a), it seems as likely that it is a nonce-formation, signifying ‘repayment’ or ‘recompense’. Moreover, the power of the poetry blurs the complexity of viewpoints being simultaneously presented: we hear what the ‘young fighter’ hears, and are perhaps only dimly aware that these are the projected words of a supposed ‘aged spear-warrior’ as imagined by Beowulf in a speech to his lord that is his placed in his mouth by the poet. The audience is three-fold: the ‘young fighter’, Hygelac, and ourselves, each of whom is addressed by their own authority: the ‘aged spear-warrior’, Beowulf, and the poet. The passage as a whole demonstrates perfectly this poet’s use of a triple perspective: just as Hrothgar cannot foresee the outcome of his daughter’s betrothal, although Beowulf, with the growing wisdom proper to a hero who will one day assume the throne, can; so too Beowulf cannot know the end of the feud, although the

20 On meaningful personal names elsewhere in Beowulf, see above, pp. 172–3.
poet (and his audience) can. A similar use of perspective is implicit in the other passages discussed above: the Danes who sacrifice to false gods through ‘the hope of heathens’ (*hæþenra hyht*, line 179a) are perceived by the Christian poet to be in fatal error; and Beowulf is acknowledged to be the mightiest of men, but only from a strictly historical and secular perspective: final judgment is suspended. There are levels of ignorance implicit in the poem, and the poet himself claims no ultimate knowledge.

It has been suggested that precisely this technique of juxtaposing different points of view, of combining explicit praise with implicit censure can be seen in the lengthy passage describing the gifts given to Beowulf after he defeats Grendel (lines 1011–29):22

Ne gefrægen ic þa mæge maran weorode
ymb hyra sincgyfan sel geberan.
Bugon þa to bence blædagande,
fylle gefægon; fægere gefægon
medoful manig magas þara
swiðhicgende on sele þam hean,
Hroðgar ond Hroþulf. Heorot innan wæs
freondum afyllod; nalles facenstafas
þeodscyldingas þenden fremedon.
Forgeaf þa Beowulfe brand Healfdenes
segen gyldenne sigores to leane;
hroden hilddecumbor, helm ond byrnan,
mære maðþumsweord manige gesawon
beforan beorn beran. Beowulf gepah
ful on flette; no he þære feohgyfte
for sceotendum scamigan dorfte.
Ne gefrægn ic freondlicor feower madmas

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21 Similar levels of perspective have been seen in the Finn-episode (above, pp. 173–87), with which, indeed, the Ingeld-episode is often directly compared; see, for example, Anderson, ‘Formulaic Typescene Survival: Finn, Ingeld, and the *Nibelungenlied*’; Hart, ‘Tectonic Design, Formulaic Craft, and Literary Execution’. Other noteworthy discussions of the Ingeld-episode include Hoops, ‘Time and Place in the Ingeld Episode of *Beowulf*’; Malone, ‘Ingeld’; *idem*, ‘Freawaru’; *idem*, ‘The Tale of Ingeld’; Steadman, ‘The Ingeld-Episode in *Beowulf*: History or Prophecy?’? Most discussions of Ingeld include reference to Alcuin’s famous question (derived from Jerome), berating monks for listening to secular heroic tales: ‘What has Ingeld to do with Christ?’ (*Quid Hinieldus cum Christo?*). On the historical background to Alcuin’s outburst, see now Bullough, ‘What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne?’.

22 The manuscript reads *hilte cumbor* at line 1022a and *scotenum* at line 1026a; the latter is a apparently a scribal error of a common kind (see above, pp. 42–6), while the former is interesting in as much as the scribe has apparently mistaken the common element *hild(e)*- (on which see above, pp. 69–72) for a form of *hilt* (‘hilt’; *cf.*, lines 1574a, 1614b, 1686b, 1677a, 1687b, and 2987a), presumably because of the double mention of a sword (lines 1020b and 1023a). The syntax of line 1020, with Hrothgar apparently the unexpressed subject and the same sword apparently mentioned twice, has caused consternation to many, who would emend *brand* in 1020b to *bearn* (‘son’). It may be that there has been eye-skip from a now-lost half-line *bearn Healfdenes* (describing who gave the sword) to *brand Healfdenes* (describing whose sword was given). See further Kuhn, ‘The Sword of Healfdenes’; *idem*, ‘Further Thoughts on *brand Healfdenes*’; Mitchell, ‘*Beowulf*, line 1020b: *brand* or *bearn*?;’ Watanabe, ‘Final Words on *Beowulf* 1020b: *brand Healfdenes*’. It has been argued that similar eye-skip occurs elsewhere in the manuscript (see above, pp. 45–7), and the resulting identification of men and swords has been identified as another *leitmotif* of the poem (see above, pp. 76, 185–6, and 240–1).
Sandwiched between the poet’s assurance of the excellence of all that he is reporting (Ne gefrægen . . . maran, line 1011; Ne gefrægn ic freondlicor, line 1027a) is what has been interpreted as a darker vision: that of Hrothgar and Hrothulf, uncle and nephew, apparent representatives of the old and young factions in the hall (cf. duguþe ond geogoþe, lines 160b, 621a, and 1674a). Amid the scenes of merriment, beautifully conveyed with rhyme (gefægon . . . gefægon), assonance (gefægon feæere gefægon), and wordplay (fylle . . . medoful) appearing together in three consecutive half-lines (lines 1014–15a), other perspectives are offered.

From a number of other sources we know that Hrothulf, who of all the characters in Beowulf has been called ‘the blankest’,23 was a major figure in Scandinavian legend,24 much better known than Hrothgar whom (according to Norse sources) he succeeded to the Danish crown, subsequently sending into exile Hrothgar’s sons, Hrethric and Hrothgar. In particular, Saxo Grammaticus tells us that a certain Rolvo (Old English Hrothulf), son of Helgo (Old English Halga), son of Haldanus (Old English Healfdene) killed Roricus (Old English Hrethric), before he himself was killed by another of the Danish royal line of the Scyldings, Hiarwarthus (Old English Heoroweard, son of Heorogar, son of Healfdene).25 But in Beowulf all these events are in the future, and Hrothulf’s precise role unclear. 26 It has therefore been suggested that the poet is using the word penden (‘at that time’, line 1019b) in a loaded way, looking forward to the end of the very friendship the poet is apparently celebrating.27 As with the earlier remark introducing Beowulf as the strongest on that day of this life, it is

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23 Shippey, Beowulf, p. 32.
24 See above, pp. 219–21 and 244–7.
25 For the relevant chapters, see Olrik and Raeder, ed., Saxonis Gesta Danorum, II.vi–viii (pp. 48–63); cf. Davidson and Fisher, Saxo Grammaticus, I.51–64. See too the on-line text of the Gesta Danorum (details in section C of the Bibliography). For the family relationships of the Scyldings, see the Genealogy on p. xiv.
26 For a range of attempts to explain the role and function of Hrothulf in Beowulf, see, for example, Bremmer, ‘The Importance of Kinship’; Kluge, ‘Der Beowulf und die Hrolfs saga kraka’; McDavid, ‘Hroþulf, Hengest, and Beowulf’; Morgan, ‘The Treachery of Hrothulf’.
notable that the key word *þenden* (‘at that time’, line 1019b) is both stressed and carries alliteration, in a way which is unusual, to say the least.\(^{28}\)

An equally ambiguous later scene in *Beowulf* also depicts Hrothgar and Hrothulf together, as Wealhtheow bustles about the hall immediately after the so-called Finn-episode,\(^ {29}\) itself of course a story of kin-slaying and betrayal in which the Danes are centrally involved (lines 1162b–68a):\(^ {30}\)

> Þa cwom Wealþeo forð gan under gyldnum beage, þær þa godan twegen sæton suhtergefæderan; þa gyt wæs hiera sib ætgæedere, æghwylc oðrum trywe. Swylce þær Unferþ pyle 1165 æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga; gehwylc hiora his ferhþe treowde, þæt he hæfde mod micel, þeah þe he his magum nære arfæst æt ecca gelacum.

[Then Wealhtheow came forth, striding under a golden diadem, where the goodly pair, sat together, uncle and nephew; at that time their kinship was still intact, each true to the other. Likewise Unferth the *pyle* sat there at the foot of the lord of the Scyldings; each of them trusted his spirit, that he had great courage, even though he was not merciful to his kinsmen at the play of swords.]

These lines stand out from the surrounding material by reason of their metre, a factor which suggests that they need to be read as a unit.\(^ {31}\) The appearance of Wealhtheow follows hard upon the end of the Finn-episode, in which attention has been focused on the political impotence of Hildeburh, once a proud queen.\(^ {32}\)

The very awkwardness of the juxtaposition ought to serve as a warning not to take the scene too readily at face value; the mention of Unferth, here acknowledged to be the kin-slayer that Beowulf had earlier reckoned him to be, is equally disturbing: the internal verbal echoes (*æghwylc . . . trywe*, line 1165a; *gehwylc . . . treowde*, line 1166b) only underline the fragility of the situation, and the extent to which ‘faith’ is not a commodity to be taken for granted among these people, or at least not taken for granted for too long. One might note that the two characters of Hrothgar and Hrothulf are found linked together in surviving Old English outside *Beowulf* also, in *Widsith*, lines 45–9:\(^ {33}\)

> Hroþwulf ond Hroðgar heoldon lengest 45 sibbe ætsomne suhtorfæderan sibþan hy forwærcon Wicinga eynn ond Ingeldes ord forbígdan forheowan æt Heorote Heaðobeardna þrym

\(^{28}\) The word *þenden* occurs fourteen times in *Beowulf* (lines 30a, 57b, 284b, 1019b, 1177b, 1224b, 1859a, 2038a, 2418a, 2490b, 2649b, 2985a, 3027a, and 3100a), but only carries the alliteration here and (perhaps) in line 284b, in a parallel passage.

\(^{29}\) For a detailed discussion of the Finn-episode (including these very lines), see above, pp. 173–86.

\(^{30}\) The manuscript clearly reads *hun ferþ* at 1165b, its customary spelling of his name.

\(^{31}\) On the use of such metrical clues in *Beowulf*, see above, pp. 66–9.

\(^{32}\) On the juxtaposition, see above, pp. 219–22.

[Hroþwulf [= Hrothulf] and Hrothgar kept peace together longest, uncle and nephew, after they had driven off the race of Wicingas and humiliated Ingeld’s vanguard, cut down the might of the Heathobards at Heorot.]

One notes here the same dvandva-compound, suhtorfæderan (line 46b) that we find elsewhere in extant Old English only in the parallel passage from Beowulf (suhtergefæderan, line 1164a).  

It is against this background of the implicit undermining of positive images and the constant reminders that what we see is only a partial picture that the explicit verbal attack on Beowulf by Unferth is perhaps best to be viewed. Like Hrothulf, with whom he is seen in the unsettling tableau just discussed, Unferth appears an ambiguous figure who continues to fascinate generations of critics, for whom even the spelling of his name, let alone its meaning, is a point of contention. We are told that Beowulf’s father was well-known at Hrothgar’s court, and perhaps even swore an oath of allegiance (if that is the force of what Hrothgar says in line 470b: he me aþas swor); Hrothgar himself claims to have known Beowulf as a boy (Ic hine cuðe cnihtwesende, line 372), the utter disingenuousness of the opening question posed by Unferth seems therefore particularly striking (lines 506–10a):  

‘Eart þu se Beowulf, se þe wið Brecan wunne, on sidne sæ ymb sund flite, ðær git for wence wada cunnedon ond for dolgilpe on deop wæter aldrum nepdon?’  

[Are you that Beowulf who contended with Breca on the wide sea, competed in the surge, where the two of you out of pride made trial of the waters, and for a foolish boast risked your lives in deep water?]

Such an opening salvo cannot be interpreted as anything other than extremely aggressive, even ignoring the direct statement from the poet that in speaking Unferth ‘unbound a battle-rune’ (onband beadurune, line 501a). Unferth’s precise position within the court has been much debated; some would reduce the

34 On the possibility of a direct connection between Beowulf and Widsith, see above, pp. 115–16.
36 On Breca in general, see Lawrence, ‘The Breca Episode in Beowulf’; McNamara, ‘Legends of Breca and Beowulf’; Nelles, ‘Beowulf’s sorhfullne sid with Breca’; Wentersdorf, ‘Beowulf’s Adventure with Breca’.
status of his stated role as *þyle* (1165b and 1456b), sitting at Hrothgar’s feet (*æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga*, line 500 and 1166a) to no more than that of a kind of court-jester, but alongside the appearance of the word glossing Latin *scurra* (‘buffoon’) we find *gelæred þyle* glossing Latin *doctus orator* (‘learned speaker’).37 As a character with a specific, even celebrated, lineage (Ecglaf, his father, is named four times in lines 499b, 590b, 1465b, and 1808a), who is the owner of a splendid sword (Hrunting is likewise named four times in lines 1457b, 1490b, 1659b, and 1807b), who appears to have played a significant (if perhaps not very honourable) role in the Danish succession. The lines immediately preceding his verbal assault on Beowulf describe not a coward or a scoundrel, but a man with a sense of his own status and a keen eye to personal glory (lines 501b–5):38

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wæs him Beowulfes sið,} \\
\text{modges merefaran, micel æþpunca,} \\
\text{forþon þe he ne uþe þæt ænig oðer man} \\
\text{æfre mærða þon ma middangeardes} \\
\text{gehedde under heofenum þonne he sylfa.}
\end{align*}
\]

[To him the voyage of Beowulf, the bold seafarer, was a great irritant, since he would not allow that any other man in the world should pay more heed to glorious deeds under heaven than he did himself.]

At all events, Unferth’s speech is a cunning, even witty, attack of a supposed piece of folly by both Beowulf and Breca (lines 510b–528):39

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{‘Ne inc ænig mon,} \\
\text{ne leof ne lað, belean mihte} \\
\text{sorhfullne sið, þa git on sund reon.} \\
\text{Þær git eagarstream earmum þehton,} \\
\text{maetön merestraæta, mundum brugdon,} \\
\text{glidon ofer garsecg; geofon yþum weol,} \\
\text{wintrys wylmun.} \\
\text{Git on wæteres æht} \\
\text{seofon niht swuncon; he þe æt sunde oferflat,} \\
\text{hæfde mare mægen.} \\
\text{Þa hine on morgentid} \\
\text{on Heðoræmas holm up ætbær;} \\
\text{ðonon he gesohnte} \\
\text{swæsne .\text{ المتعلقة}} \\
\text{leof his leodum, lond Brondinga,} \\
\text{freoðoburh fægere, þær he folc ahte} \\
\text{burh ond beagas. Beot eal wið þe} \\
\text{sunu Beanstanes soðe gelæste.} \\
\text{ðonne wene ic to þe} \\
\text{wyrsan gepingea,} \\
\text{ðeal þu heaðoræsa gehwær dohte,} \\
\text{grimre guðe, gif þu Grendles dearst} \\
\text{nihtlonge fyrst nean bidan.’}
\end{align*}
\]

37 Cf. the remarks of Bjork, ‘Unferth in the Hermeneutic Circle’.
38 For the interpretation of *gehedde* (line 505a) I follow Pope, ‘*Beowulf* 505, “gehedde”, and the Preten- sions of Unferth’.
39 The manuscript reads *wyln* at 516a (through haplography?). On the use of the rune .\text{ المتعلقة} for *epel* in line 520b, see above, p. 40.
Nor could any man, friend or foe, dissuade the two of you from your painful trip, when you two thrashed about in the surge, where the pair of you encompassed with your arms the flowing streams, measured out the briny paths, swept them with your hands, glided over the ocean. The deep seethed with waves, winter’s swell; you two toiled for seven nights in the water’s domain; he surpassed you in the surge, had greater might; then in the morning the sea swept him up on the land of the Heathoremes. From there he made for his dear homeland, dear to his people, the land of the Brondings, the fair stronghold. The son of Beanstan truly fulfilled his whole vow to you. So I expect a worse outcome from you, however much you have prospered everywhere in conflicts, grim battle, if you dare to wait close at hand for Grendel through the night.’

The verbal display is impressive, a piece of careful patterning: the fourfold description of Beowulf and Breca at sea is a splendid thumbnail sketch, with its steady repetition of preterite verbs and different patterns evident in the b-lines (earmum þehton . . . mundum brugdon) and the a-lines (maetom merestræta . . . glidon ofer garsecg). The ambiguity of all these terms, which might well apply to either rowing or swimming, is surely calculated; as Roberta Frank has indicated, Unferth seems deliberately to have used the equally ambiguous term sund no fewer than thee times in the twenty-three lines of his speech (507a, 512b, and 517b), playing on the prosaic meaning ‘swimming’ of a term that in verse means ‘sea’, and so lending a fantastic quality to a marine contest that lasts a whole week. Unferth’s claim is that Beowulf failed to live up to his promise, and that the whole contest was undertaken ‘for pride and a foolish boast’ (for wlence . . . o n df o rdolgilpe, lines 508a and 509a), again terms which appear here to contain negative connotations.

But if Unferth’s speech is a cunning composition, it is more than matched by that of Beowulf. Nowhere, however, does Beowulf deny the basic charge of youthful folly; indeed, he concedes it twice at the very start, as he effectively throws Unferth’s words back in his face (lines 530–43):

‘Hwæt! þu worn fela, wine min Unferð, 530
beore druncen ymb Brecan spræce, sægdest from his siðe. Soð ic talige, 535
þæt ic merestrengo maran ahte, earfeþo on þum, ðonne ænig oþer man.
Wit þæt gecwædon cnihtwesende
ond gebeotedon (waeron begen þa git on geogoðfeore) þæt wit on garsecg ut
aldrum neðdon, ond þæt gæfðon swa.

40 Frank, ‘“Mere” and “Sund”: Two Sea-Changes in Beowulf’.
41 The phrase for wlence (in the form for wlenco) occurs in the poem on two further occasions: at 338a (where it is used by the coastguard in an apparently positive sense to describe Beowulf’s own reasons for coming to Denmark), and at 1206a (where it is used in an apparently negative sense to refer to Hygelac’s ill-fated final trip). On dol- compounds elsewhere in the poem, see below, pp. 261–2.
42 On Beowulf as a skilful speaker, see Baker, ‘Beowulf the Orator’; Barringer, ‘Adding Insult to the Inquiry’; Silber, ‘Rhetoric as Prowess in the Unferð Episode’. Also see above, pp. 208–18.
Hæfdon swurd nacod, þa wit on sund reon, heard on handa; wit unc wið hronfixas werian þohton. No he wiht fram me flodybym feor fleotan meahte, hраФor on holme; no ic fram him wolde.’

[‘Listen! You have said a great deal, Unferth my friend, about Breca, spoken of his experience. I reckon it true that I had greater sea-strength, hardships on the waves, than any other man. We two spoke when we were lads, and made vows – we were at that time both young – that we would risk our lives out on the ocean; and we brought it about. We held drawn swords, when we two thrashed about in the surge – we thought to protect ourselves against whales – not a bit could he float far from me on the sea-waves, quicker in the water, nor did I want to leave him.’]

Beowulf, however, does not simply repeat phrases from Unferth’s own speech (aldrum neþdon, line 510a: aldrum neðdon, line 538a; þa git on sund reon, line 512b: þa wit on sund reon, line 539b), much in the same way as in The Battle of Maldon, Byrhtnoth casts back the words of the Viking messenger in his teeth; he also seems to echo elements of Hrothgar’s immediately preceding speech. Just as Hrothgar began by courteously addressing Beowulf as his friend (wine min Beowulf, line 457b; cf. line 1704b), so too, in the only other occurrence of the phrase, Beowulf extends the courtesy to the distinctly discourteous Unferth (wine min Unferð, line 530b). Hrothgar had lamented the fact that while many of his retainers had sworn formal vows by the drinking of beer to defeat Grendel (gebeotedon beore druncne, line 480), none had accomplished their vow; Beowulf calmly points out that while Unferth has undoubtedly drunk some beer (beore druncen, line 531a), the vows that Beowulf and Breca swore (gebeotedon, line 536a) were fully accomplished. Beowulf points out the partial nature of Unferth’s account by stating that he has only told what occurred from Breca’s point of view (ymb Brecan . . . from his side, lines 531b–532a): a seven-day struggle that saw Breca, whose role as a prince of the Brondings is supported in Widsith (line 25a: Breoca [weold] Brondingum), cast up on the shores of the Heathoreamas.

Beowulf, by contrast, vouches only for the five nights that he and Breca were together, before the tides separated them (lines 544–8):

43 So, for example, one might compare the messenger’s garræs mid gafole forgyleldon (line 32) with Byrhtnoth’s to gafole garras syllan (line 46; note the reversal of word-order, and the phrase gofol syllan in line 61b); the messenger’s we willah mid þam sceattum us to scype gangan (line 40) with Byrhtnoth’s þæt ge mid urum sceattum to scype gangon (line 56); the messenger’s we swa hearde (line 33a) with Byrhtnoth’s ge swa sofle (line 59a). See further Robinson, ‘Some Aspects of the Maldon-Poet’s Artistry’; Orchard, ‘The Hisperica famina as Literature’, p. 8.

44 Again, a good parallel is to be found in The Battle of Maldon: compare the narrator’s se on beot abead brimilpendra (line 27) with Byrhtnoth’s Briminana boda abeod eft ongean (line 49).

45 The words need not imply, as they are usually taken, that Unferth was drunk; on the use of the term ‘drunk’ here, see in general Gould, ‘Euphemistic Renderings of the Word druncen in Beowulf’; Magennis, ‘The Beowulf/Poet and his druncne dryhtguman’.


47 Some scholars have made heavy weather of the disparity between the two accounts, but there is no need to assume that the poet has slipped up here: Beowulf only comments on the time that he and Breca were together, and leaves Unferth to account for the rest. For an interesting analogue to the
Then we two were on the sea together for the space of five nights, until the flood separated us, surging waves, coldest of weathers, darkening night, and the north wind battle-fierce drove us apart: the waves were rough.'

We can all applaud the undoubtedly heroic exploits of Breca, who clearly fulfils the terms of the vow that, according to Beowulf, they had both made: assuredly he ‘risked his life out on the ocean’. But in Beowulf’s description, there is no mention of a direct contest, merely a shared exploit in which, however hard Breca tried to shake off Beowulf, it was left to the might of a wintry storm that Unferth passes over in two half-lines (lines 515b–516a), and Beowulf elaborates in six (lines 546–8) to separate the pair. The great bulk of the rest of Beowulf’s speech (and nearly half of the speech as a whole) is taken up not with any supposed contest with Breca but with Beowulf’s own monster-slaying exploits after he and Breca had been separated. The whole of this section of the narrative appears to be an elaboration of Beowulf’s earlier claim to Hrothgar that he had slain ‘sea-monsters by night’ (niceras nihtes, line 422a; cf. niceras . . . on niht, line 575), and, in effect, Beowulf tells the same tale twice (lines 549–58 and 559–79a). The first of these accounts concludes by saying that, although harassed by these sea-beasts and protected by his mailshirt, nonetheless he was able to wield his sword to good effect (lines 555b–8):

‘hwæþre me gyfeþe wearð 555
þæt ic aglæcan orde geræhte,
hildebille; heaþoræs fornam
mihtig meredeor þurh mine hand.’

[‘Yet it was granted to me that I pierced the awesome assailants with my war-blade; a battle-rush snatched off the mighty sea-beasts through my hand.’]

In the second account, which concludes in a very similar fashion (hwæþere me gesælde þæt ic mid sweorde ofsloh niceras nigene, lines 574–5a), Beowulf again echoes his earlier speech to Hrothgar by demonstrating his black humour, this time punning not on his own demise (as in lines 445–51), but on that of the sea-monsters, whom he portrays as (quite literally) served ill by one they had hoped to have for dinner (lines 559–69a):
‘Swa mec gelome laðgeteonan þreatedon þearle. Ic him þenode 560
deoran sweorde, swa hit gedefe wæs.
Næs hie ðære fylle gefean hæfdon,
manfordædlan, þæt hie me þegon,
symbel ymbsaetæn sægrunde neah;
ac on mergenne mecum wunde 565
be yðlafe uppe lægon,
sweordum aswefede, þæt syðþan na
ymb brontne ford brimliðende
lade ne letton.’

[‘So, often, the hateful persecutors closely oppressed me; I served them
with my splendid sword, as was fitting. In no way did those wicked crea-
tures have joy of their feast, that they might consume me as they sat at
their feast near the sea-floor; but in the morning, wounded by my blade
they lay up along the sea-shore, put to sleep by my sword, so that never
afterwards did they hinder seafarers in their travels.’]

Beowulf tops off this section of his reply with a typically gritty gnomic saying:
‘fate often spares an undoomed man, if his courage suffices’ (Wyrd oft nereð / unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen deah, lines 572b–573). He continues his version
of the story with a clear echo of what he had said before (compare lines 574–5a
with 555b–556 above), before turning to criticise Unferth directly (lines
574–89):51

‘Hwæþere me gesælde þæt ic mid sweorde ofsloh
niceras nigene. No ic on niht gefrægn 575
under heofones hwealf heardran feohtan,
ne on egstreamum earman mannun;
hwæþere ic fara feng feore gedigde,
sîpes werig. Da mec se oðbær,
flod æfter farode on Finna land,
wadu weallendu. No ic wiht fram þe
swylcra searoniða secgan hyrde,
billa brogan. Breca næfræ gís
æt headolace, ne gehwæþer incer,
swa deorlice dæd gefremede
580
fagum sweordum. No ic þæs sopæs gylpe,
þeah þu þinum broðrum to banan wurdæ,
heafodmægium; þæs þu in healle scealt
werhþo dreogan, þeah þin wit duge.’

[‘Yet it was granted me that I slew with my sword nine water-monsters. I
have not heard of a harder fight under the vault of heaven, nor a man

51 There are a number of textual problems here: the manuscript reads hwæþere in line 578a (on æa-
confusion, see above, pp. 42 and 45–6); wadu in line 581 (on æu-confusion, see above, pp. 42–6); no
ic þæs gylpe in line 586b (soþæs has been supplied, following Bammesberger, ‘The Emendation of
Beowulf, l. 586’, and assuming eye-skip through homoeoteleuton [on which see above, pp. 45–7]); . . .
e scealt in line 588b (healle has been partly supplied from Thorkelin A and B, which both read helle;
on the change from helle to healle, see n. 54 below); þeah þin . . . uge in line 589b (the letters wit d-
have been supplied from Thorkelin A).
more wretched in the mighty streams; yet I escaped with my life the clutches of my foes. Then the sea bore me up, the flood from the current in the land of the Finns, the surging waves. I have not heard tell a jot about such dire straits in your case, terror of swords. Breca never yet in battle-play, nor either of you pair, did so brave a deed with patterned swords. I don’t brag of the truth, even though you turned out to be the slayer of your brothers, your chief kinsmen; for that you shall suffer condemnation in the hall, even though your wit may suffice.’

This section of Beowulf’s speech is clearly structured through repetition (No ic . . . No ic . . . No ic, lines 575b, 581b, and 586b), as Beowulf turns the spotlight from his own heroism to Unferth’s shame. The textual difficulties of the passage make the precise import of Beowulf’s words difficult to assess, although evidently he is reacting to Unferth’s criticisms with a few home-truths of his own. Given the commonplace nature of accusations of fratricide in such flytings or formal exchanges of abuse, generally exchanged before battle, however, we cannot be sure that Unferth really is (at least at this point) a killer of his kin, notwithstanding the poet’s own later assertions that Unferth was a trusted figure in the Danish court ‘even though he was not merciful to his kinsmen at the play of swords’ (peah he his magum nære / arfæst æt ecga gelacum, lines 1167b–8a). Likewise, despite the witness of both Thorkelin A and B that the manuscript read helle (‘hell’) rather than healle (‘hall’) at line 588b, it seems perhaps safer to assume that a christianising scribe rather than Beowulf himself has condemned Unferth to be damned in hell.

At all events, and although this section of his speech might seem the peak of

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53 See now Nagy, ‘A Reassessment of Unferð’s Fratricide in Beowulf’.

54 For this reading, see Robinson, ‘Elements of the Marvellous’, pp. 129–30. For similar signs of a putative ‘christianising scribe’ see line 1983a, where the δ of the original reading heðnun (‘heathens’) has been erased by the scribe, who is presumably as puzzled as modern scholars by an apparently random reference to Geats as ‘heathens’ in his exemplar; most modern editions emend to healeðum (‘warriors’). A similar case may be found in line 1816a, where the manuscript clearly reads helle, and most editors emend to hale (‘man’, ‘hero’). Likewise, the manuscript clearly reads fyrena (‘sins’) at line 2250b, generally emended to fyra (‘fires’). More problematic cases where a scribe may have introduced a christianising reading are drihten wereda (‘lord of hosts’) at line 2186a and for metode (‘for god’) at line 169a. In the first instance, the phrases wereda drihten and drihten wereda apply to god in a large number of extant Old English poems (Genesis, lines 255b, 352b, 386b, 1362a, 1411b, and 2382b; Exodus, lines 8b and 92a; Daniel, line 220b; Christ and Satan, lines 197b and 580b; Andreas, lines 173a, 435a, 727b, 1206b, and 1663b; Soul and Body I, line 14b; Homiletic Fragment I, lines 7b and 10b; Elene, line 896b; Christ I, line 428b; Guthlac A, line 134b; Descent into Hell, lines 120b, 126b, and 133b; Judith, line 342a; Metres of Boethius 20, line 86b; Paris Psalter 79.16, line 4, 83.3, line 1, 88.5, line 1, and 103.29, line 1b; Psalm 50, lines 30a, 36a, 94b, and 121a; Psalm Fragment 50.13, line 3b; Instructions to Christians, line 193b; Gloria 2, line 1), and most editors emend to drihten Wedera (‘lord of the Geats’); in the second instance, it has been argued that what is intended is the past tense of a notional verb formetian (on the model of forhicgan), meaning ‘despise’: see further Bammesberger, ‘Five Beowulf Notes’, pp. 243–8, and on the general problem Chaney, ‘Grendel and the Gifstol: a Legal View of Monsters’; Kaske, ‘The Gifstol Crux in Beowulf’; Ono, ‘Grendel’s Not Greeting the Gifstol Reconsidered’; Robinson, ‘Why is Grendel’s Not Greeting the Gifstol a Wræc Micel?’ For an apparent example of a christianising scribe elsewhere in Old English, see Christ II, line 485a, where the manuscript reads clearly heofonum (‘heavens’), but editors generally emend to heøpnum (‘heathens’).
his response, it is interesting to observe that Beowulf continues his reply to Unferth in a way which subtly seems to undermine not merely Unferth, but all the Danes (lines 590–603a):55

‘Secge ic þe to soðe, sunu Ecglafes,
þæt næfre Grendel swa fela gryra gefremede,
atol æglæca, ealdre þinum,
hynðo on Heorote, gif þin hige ware,
sefa swa searogrim, swa þu self talast.
Ac he hafað onfunden þæt he þa fæhðe ne þearf,
atole egþræce eower leode
swiðe onsitan, Sigescyldinga;
nymeð nydbade, nænegum arað
leode Deniga, ac he lust wigeð,
swefeð ond snedeþ, secce ne weneþ
to Gardenum. Ac ic him Geata sceal
eafoð ond ellen ungeara nu,
guþe gebeodan.’

[‘I tell you for a truth, son of Ecglaf, that Grendel would never have carried out such terrors, that dread assailant, against your lord, humiliation in Heorot, if your spirit, your heart was as cunningly fierce, as you yourself reckon. But he has found out that he does not need greatly to fear the enmity and dread sword-clash of your people, the Victory-Scyldings; he extracts a needful contribution, he honours none of the people of the Danes, but he exercises his will, he kills and preys, and expects no fighting from the Spear-Danes. But I shall show him very soon the power and courage and conflict of the Geats.’]

Beowulf begins by asserting ‘truth’, just as he did at the opening of his reply (Soð ic talige, line 532b),56 but moves quickly away from a personal attack on Unferth to more general comments on his people: the change from ‘your [singular] lord’ (ealdre þinum, line 592b) to ‘your [plural] people’ (eower leode, line 596b) is masterful, and the repeated references to the Danes (Sigescyldinga . . . Deniga . . . Gardenum, lines 597b, 599a, and 601a) emphasise the switch. That the Danes at this point are described as ‘Victory-Scyldings’ (Sigescyldinga, line 597b) and ‘Spear-Danes’ (Gardenum, line 601a) at this least martial and

55 In fact, the manuscript reads gre del at line 591a, but the emendation is a simple one, and (almost) universally accepted. Likewise, the manuscript reads sendeþ (‘sends’) at line 600a, a reading which some (like Klaeber, ed., Beowulf, pp. 151–2) retain on the grounds of a supposed parallel with the Vergilian mittere Orco (‘to send to the underworld’) or mittere umbris (‘to send to the shades’). See too Liberman, ‘Germanic Sendan “To Make a Sacrifice” ’. It seems, however, easier to assume scribal metathesis (on which see above, pp. 43–5) for snedeþ or snædeþ (on e for æ see above, pp. 42 and 45–6), and to posit a verb snædan meaning ‘to eat’, ‘swallow’ (cf. line 743a: synsnædum swealh [‘(Grendel) swallowed in huge bites’]). Such a reading has the advantage of providing with swefeþ (lit. ‘put to sleep’) an association between feasting and sleeping that is a leitmotif of the poem as a whole: see, for example, Kavros, ‘Swefan æfter symble: the Feast-Sleep Theme in Beowulf’; Magennis, ‘Beowulf, 1008a: swefeþ æfter symle’; McFadden, ‘Sleeping after the Feast: Deathbeds, Marriage Beds, and the Power-Structure of Heorot’.

56 Truth would again be stressed in line 586b, if we accept the suggestion of Bammesberger, ‘The Emendation of Beowulf, l. 586’, that manuscript þæs conceals an original þæs soþæs.
heroic point in their national life is striking, to say the least;\(^{57}\) the emphasis that follows on the valour of the Geats (Geata . . . eafoð ond ellen . . . guþe, lines 601b–3a) creates a surely deliberate point of contrast.

Clearly, such an outstanding rhetorical display is important in the context of establishing Beowulf’s credentials to fight Grendel: unlike Unferth, whose words and deeds do not tally, Beowulf can transform his words into courage and his courage into deeds; little wonder that when Beowulf takes his leave of Hrothgar over twelve hundred lines later, the grateful old king declares the young hero a paragon in thought, word, and deed (Pu eart mægenes strang ond on mode frod, wis wordcwida, lines 1844–5a).\(^{58}\) Against this unqualified praise, however, it is important to note that the poet’s final judgment on Beowulf in the part of the poem based on Beowulf’s Danish exploits is perhaps somewhat curiously phrased (lines 2166b–2171 and 2177–89):\(^ {59}\)

Swa sceal mæg don, nealles inwitnet oðrum bregdon dyrnnum crafte, deað renian hondgesteallan. Hygelace wæs, niða heardum, nefa swyðe hold, ond gehwæðer oðrum hroþra gemyndig. 2170

Swa bealdode bearn Ecgðeowes, guma guðum cuð, godum dædum, dreah æfter dome, nealles druncne slog heordgeneatas; næs him hreoh sefa, ac he mancynnes maeste crafte ginfaestan gife, þe him god sealde, heold hildedeor. Hean wæs lange, swa hyne Geata bearn godne ne tealdon, ne hyne on medobence micles wyrône drihten Wedera gedon wolde; swyðe wendon þæt he sleac ware, æðeling unfrom. Edwenden cwom tireadigum menn torna gehwylces. 2180

[So must a kinsman do, in no way weave a malice-net for another, with concealed cunning, prepare death for a close companion. To Hygelac, a man brave in conflicts, his nephew was very loyal, and each mindful of benefits for the other . . . So did Ecgtheow’s son show himself brave, a man known for battles, good deeds; he acted for glory, in no way did he slay drunk hearth-companions: his heart was not savage, but the

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\(^{57}\) Compare the poet’s description of the Danes who leave the monster-mere once they assume that Beowulf has been killed by Grendel’s mother as ‘brave’ (Næs ofgeafon / hwate Scyldingas, lines 1601b–1602a).

\(^{58}\) On this figure, see Sims-Williams, ‘Thought, Word, and Deed: an Irish Triad’. See too above, pp. 55, 73, 146, and 218.

\(^{59}\) The manuscript reads wereda at line 2186a, presumably as a result of scribal confusion with the common (Christian) formula wereda drihten (‘lord of hosts’), which occurs numerous times in Old English poetry (see above, n. 54). On the notion that Beowulf was a ‘slack’ youth, cf. Bonjour, ‘Young Beowulf’s Inglorious Period’; Eliason, ‘Beowulf’s Inglorious Youth’; Tripp, ‘Did Beowulf Have an “Inglorious Youth”?’. 
battle-warrior with very great strength kept the liberal gift that God had
granted him. For a long time he was of low esteem, so that the children
of the Geats did not reckon him good, nor was the lord of the Weders
willing to honour him much on the mead-bench; they greatly thought
that he was slack, a feeble prince. A reversal of every affliction came for
the glorious man.]

Both these passages, it might be noted, are rich in alliterative effect: the first
concludes with three consecutive lines alliterating on ‘h’ (lines 2169–71), whilst
the second ends with consecutive examples of cross-alliteration (lines 2186–7)
and with paronomasia (wendon . . . Edwenden, lines 2187–8). Praise of Beowulf
is somewhat undermined by the implied criticism of others: the fact that he
never plotted to kill a close companion or slew his drunken hearth-companions
might be thought scarcely to constitute a ringing endorsement of his moral
probity, although it should be stressed that both crimes might be attributed to the
Danes Unferth, Heremod, and (perhaps) Hrothulf.60 If Hrothgar clearly
considers Beowulf a paragon amongst men, the poet implicitly reminds us both
at the beginning and at the end of his adventures in Denmark that the men
against whom he is measured are not themselves beyond reproach.

Enter the dragon: Wiglaf struggles to defend the hero

But if the first part of Beowulf, dealing with his youthful exploits in Denmark,
contains a disturbingly high number of implicit and explicit criticisms of the
characters depicted, the second part of poem, dealing with the dragon-fight, is
still darker in tone. After fifty years on the throne, Beowulf, like Hrothgar, has
an unwelcome visitor.61 Like Hrothgar gazing on the hilt from the
monster-mere, the thief’s lord (perhaps Beowulf himself) is depicted gazing in
uncomprehending inaction at the dragon’s stolen cup.62 But in the very moment
that the thief’s lord is frozen in silent contemplation of the stolen cup, the
dragon itself is all action (lines 2287–311).64

60 See further above, pp. 240–55.
61 On the significance of the fifty-year period, see above, pp. 64, 162, and 196.
62 See further above, pp. 50, 100, and 113.
63 On parallel tableaux elsewhere in the poem, see above, p. 216.
64 The manuscript reads hlæw at line 2296b, hilde at line 2298b, fela ða at line 2305a, and læg at
2307b. For the emendation of hilde to wiges at line 2298b (effectively, a substitution of one synonym
which will not alliterate for another which will), see above, pp. 51 and 178. On the f/s-confusion that
appears to account for the reading at line 2305a, see above, pp. 42 and 44–5; a missing nasal-suspension
(on which see above, p. 181) will account for the manuscript-reading at 2307b.
georne æfter grunde, wolde guman findan, 2295
þone þe him on sweofote sare geteode, hat ond hroemod hlæw oft ymbehwearf
ealne utanweardne, ne ðæt ænig mon on þære westenne; hwæðre wiges gefeh,
beaduwe weorces, hwilum on beorh æthwearf, sincfæt sohte. He þæt sona onfand
ðæt hæfde gumena sum goldes gefandod, hordweard onbad
earfðlice oððæt æfen cwom; wæs ða gebolgen beorges hyrde wolde se laða lige forgyldan
drincfæt dyre. Þa wæs deæg sceacen wyrme on willan; no on wealle læng,
bidan wolde, ac mid bæle for, fyre gefysed. Wæs se fruma egeslic leodom on lande, swa hyt lungre wearð
on hyra sincgifar sare geendod.

[Then the dragon awoke, wrath was renewed, it scoured along the stone, fierce-hearted found the track of the foe; he had stepped forward with cunning craft close by the dragon’s head. So may an undoomed man easily survive misery and exile, when he keeps the favour of the Ruler. The guardian of the hoard searched eagerly along the ground; it wished to find the man who had grievously treated him in his sleep. Hot and fierce in heart it often stalked around the mound, all around the outside: there was no one there in the wilderness, yet it exulted in war, deeds of battle. Sometimes it stalked back into the barrow, sought out the precious vessel; it immediately discovered that a man had tampered with the gold, the rich treasures. The guardian of the hoard waited with difficulty until the evening came; then the keeper of the barrow was enraged, the hateful foe wished to pay back with flame for the precious drinking-vessel. Then the day was done, as the dragon wished; no longer would it wait by the wall, but it went with flame, ready with fire. The beginning was terrible for the people in the land, as it swiftly was brought to a dreadful end on their treasure-giver.]

The dragon’s frantic movement is suggested by the insistent repetition of both words (mainly verbs) and sounds within this brief twenty-five line passage (onfand . . . onfand, lines 2288b and 2300b; Hordweard . . . Hordweard, lines 2293b and 2302b; sohte . . . sohte, lines 2293b and 2300a; ymbehweard . . . æthweard, lines 2296b and 2299; onfand . . . gefandod, lines 2300b and 2301b). The poet’s perspective is introduced twice. On the first occasion the poet ascribes the lucky escape of the thief with the dragon’s cup to God: it seems unclear why such a character should be regarded as ‘undoomed’ (unfæge, line 2291), nor why (with emphasising assonance) he should ‘keep the favour of the Ruler’ (waldendes hyldo gehealdep, lines 2292b–2293a), unless perhaps the 

65 On the use of such ‘echo-words’, see, for example, Beaty, ‘The Echo-Word in Beowulf”; Rosier, ‘Generative Composition in Beowulf”. See too above, p. 78.
66 One might note that elsewhere in the poem the only other time that the word ‘undoomed’ is used is in
poet means to imply that the thief’s own lord (who, we later learn, may be Beowulf himself) was wrong to condemn the man in the first place. The second of the poet’s interventions is still more ominous, effectively predicting the death of Beowulf (lines 2309b–2311) almost nine hundred lines before the end of the poem.

Nor is this the last of the many grim predictions that occur before Beowulf even steps up to face his final foe; the poet concludes at least three other passages in the next hundred lines or so with similarly portentous words (lines 2341b–2344, 2399b–2400, and 2423b–2424). Furthermore, just as the poet depicts Beowulf gazing statically at the dragon’s cup while the dragon is in a frenzy of impatient action, so too, when the dragon’s dreadful vengeance comes about, Beowulf himself is pictured first in a paralysis of anguish (lines 2312–36):67

[Then the stranger began to spew flames, to burn the bright dwellings; the fire-glow remained in malice for men: the hateful flying-creature would not leave anything alive. The dragon’s fighting-power was widely visible, the wickedness of the difficult and hostile one both near and far, how that warlike ravager hated and humiliated the people of the Geats; it hastened back to the hoard, the secret noble hall before day. It had encir-

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67 The manuscript reads him at line 2325b.
ged the nation’s people in flame, with fire and burning: it trusted in its barrow, its fighting-power and fortification; that hope deceived it. Then the terror was made known to Beowulf, swiftly and truly, that his own home, best of buildings had melted in surges of flames, the gift-throne of the Geats. For that good man there was sorrow in his heart, the greatest of griefs, the wise one reckoned that he had severely offended the Ruler, the eternal Lord, contrary to ancient law; his breast welled up inside with dark thoughts, as was not customary for him. The fire-dragon had destroyed with flame that people’s stronghold, the fortress and coastal land beyond; for that the warlike king, the prince of the Weder-Geats planned vengeance.]

Beowulf’s initial maudlin inactivity is cleverly contained within an envelope pattern of the dragon’s action (Hæfde . . . lige befangen . . . Hæfde . . . gledum forgrunden, lines 2321 and 2333a–2335a), and seems to stem from a sense that he has somehow acted wrongly in God’s eyes. The dragon too is compromised, since its hope in its own protection is immediately said by the poet to be misplaced (him seo wen geleah, line 2323b),68 more chillingly, we infer from the passage that follows, Beowulf’s hope for his own protection in the form of a specially made iron shield (lines 2337–41a) is likewise misplaced, as both Beowulf and his foe are equally doomed (lines 2341b–2344):

Sceolde lændaga
æþeling ærgod ende gebidan,
worulde lifes, ond se wyrm somod,
þæh ðe hordwelan heolde lange.
[The prince, good of old, had to endure the end of his transitory days, of life in the world, and the dragon too; even though he had held the treasure-hoard for long.]

The link between Beowulf and his foe is enforced by the ambiguity of the final clause: both king and dragon have ‘held the treasure-hoard for long’. Equally striking is the fact that the poet here echoes Beowulf’s own earlier words to Hrothgar after the death of Æschere that (lines 1386–9):

‘Ure æghwylc sceal ende gebidan
worolde lifes; wyrce se þe mote
domes ær deaþe; þæt bið drihtguman
unlifgendum æfter selest.’
[‘Each of us must endure an end to life in the world; let him who can win fame before death: that is the best thing afterwards for the noble warrior once he is gone.’]

Such a link back to Beowulf’s glorious past in the light of his impending death is typical of this poet’s approach, strengthened by the fact that the only previous times in the poem when the word ‘good of old’ (ærgod, line 2342a) has been

68 On the significance of this phrase, see, for example, Ringler, ‘Him seo wen geleah: the Design for Irony in Grendel’s Last Visit to Heorot’.
applied to humans (as opposed to weapons)\textsuperscript{69} it was used of Hrothgar, brooding over Grendel’s first attack in precisely the same way as Beowulf over that of the dragon (line 130a), and of Æsclere, in the very speech by Hrothgar that prompts Beowulf’s observations on the mutability of human life (line 1329a).\textsuperscript{70}

The poet immediately backs up his statement that Beowulf was ‘good of old’ by offering a resumé of his career to date; the dispatch of Grendel and his mother are dealt with in three lines (lines 2351b–2354a), and instead the poet focuses on his exploits in Frisia when Hygelac was killed (lines 2354b–2366), on his initial refusal of the Geatish crown (lines 2367–76), on his finally becoming king after Heordred was killed by Onela (lines 2377–90), and on his role in helping Eadgils to kill Onela (lines 2391–6). The poet had prefaced this litany of heroic endeavour by stating that Beowulf had confidence in his chances against the dragon ‘because previously risking danger he had endured many attacks, battle-tumults’ (\textit{forðon he ær fela nearo neðende niða gedigde, hildehlemma}, lines 2349b–2354a); he concludes his account of Beowulf’s \textit{curriculum uitae} in precisely the same way (lines 2397–400):

\begin{quote}
Swa he niða gehwane genesen hæfde, 
slîðra geslyhta, sunu Ecgðiowes, 
ellenweorca, oð \textit{\textit{one anne deg}}
\textit{\textit{he wið \textit{\textit{ham wyrme}}}} gewegan sceolde. 2400
\end{quote}

[So the son of Ecgtheow had survived each of the attacks, cruel slaughters, mighty deeds, until that one day when he had to contend with the dragon.]

Beowulf’s gloriously successful past, the poet makes clear, is no guarantee of his future.

Before outlining the reasons for Beowulf’s faith in his own abilities against the dragon, the poet again apparently undercuts his hero by implying of Beowulf’s decision (based on his self-belief) not to attack the dragon mob-handed that it was the result of over-confidence; the verb used (\textit{oferhogode}, line 2345) cannot but recall the twin use of the related noun in Hrothgar’s so-called ‘sermon’ (\textit{oferhygda} and \textit{oferhyda}, lines 1740b and 1760b),\textsuperscript{71} in which Hrothgar explicitly warns Beowulf of the dangers of pride. The implication seems clear: Beowulf goes to face the dragon doomed.

Moreover, he seems to sense his doom: not only does the poet depict Beowulf’s heart seething with uncustomarily dark thoughts (\textit{breost innan weoll / þeostrum geþoncum, swa him geþywe ne wæs}, lines 2331b–2332).\textsuperscript{72} He goes on to make an extraordinary speech in which he muses on the fate of the Geatish King Hrethel and compares his suffering over the killing of one son by another with that of an old man who loses his son to the gallows;\textsuperscript{73} whatever the precise parallels invoked, it is clear enough that Beowulf is here brooding on the impo-

\textsuperscript{69} On the poet’s common connection of men and swords, see above, pp. 76, 185–6, 240–1, and 263.
\textsuperscript{70} For the speech, see above, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{71} See further above, pp. 155–62.
\textsuperscript{72} On these dark thoughts, see above, pp. 149 and 229.
\textsuperscript{73} On this episode, see further above, pp. 116–18.
tent grief and frustrated desire for requital of two old men in a manner which surely suggests something of his own anguish in the case of the dragon. Moreover, Beowulf follows up his musings on the sufferings of Hrethel by highlighting the case of how, after Hrethel died, another aged king, this time Ongentheow the Swede, died attempting to exact vengeance for an attack upon him by the Geats, led by Hæthcyn and Hygelac. Ironically, Hæthcyn the fratricide is himself avenged by his other brother, Hygelac, in a passage which offers the first of several glimpses of the complex feuding that characterises the wars between the Swedes and the Geats (lines 2472–89). The struggles and sufferings of the secular heroic world are painted by the poet in far from glowing terms; and Beowulf, who as a young man in Denmark was all action, is now seen in a welter of reflection and reaction.

But in the absence of a dynamic and positive Beowulf in the second part of the poem, the heroic mantle falls on Wiglaf. It has often been noted that just as the epithets used of Hrothgar in Part I are used of Beowulf in Part II, so too Wiglaf inherits the descriptions used of the young Beowulf. But (it is important to note) he speaks with a quite different voice. Like Beowulf, Wiglaf speaks no fewer than five times in Part II, but the whole tone of his addresses is distinct. Unlike the carefully choreographed speeches of Part I, including, for example, the entire series of courteous exchanges between Beowulf and the coastguard, Beowulf and Wulfgar, Wulfgar and Hrothgar, and Hrothgar and Beowulf before Unferth ever opens his mouth, all such niceties break down in Part II, which includes a series of twelve unanswered addresses by Beowulf, Wiglaf, the so-called ‘last survivor’, and the Geatish messenger. The very first of Wiglaf’s speeches is typical (lines 2633–50a):

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'Ic ðæt mæl geman, þær we medu þegun, þonne we geheton ussum hlaforde in biorsele, ðe us ðas beagas geaf, 2635
þæt we him ða guðgetawa gyldan woldon gif him ðyslicu þearf gelumpe, helmas ond heard sword. ðe he usic on herge geceas to ðyssum siðfate sylfes willum, onmundre usic mærða, ond me þas maðmas geaf, 2640
þe he usic garwigend gode tealde, hwate helmberend, þeah ðe hlaforð us þis ellenweorc ana æðohte to gefremmanne, folces hyrde, forðam he manna mæst mærða gefremede, 2645
daðda dollicra. Nu is se dæg cumen
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`I remember the time when we drank mead, and promised in the mead-hall our lord who gave us these rings that we would repay him for the war-trappings, helmets and hard swords, if a need like this should arise. That is why he chose us of his own will for the war-band on this expedition, because he reckoned us worthy of these glories, and gave me these treasures, since he counted us good spear-warriors, bold helmet-wearers, even though our lord intended to undertake this courageous task alone, the people’s keeper, since he had accomplished most glories of men, audacious (or ‘foolish’) deeds. Now the day has come that our liege lord needs the strength of good warriors. Let us go to him, help our battle-leader, while this lasts, the grim fire-terror.’

The speech is almost wholly focused on Beowulf, although it does contain a number of dialect-forms of the first-person plural pronoun and pronominal adjective (usic, ussum). Wiglaf reasserts Beowulf’s uniqueness (ana), in a striking echo of Beowulf’s first speech to Hrothgar, when he states twice in the space of six lines that he alone can bring the Danes relief (ana, line 425b; ana, line 431a). Equally striking is the way in which Wiglaf effectively echoes Unferth’s assertion that Beowulf is impervious to sensible advice. But perhaps the most intriguing part of this speech is that in which Wiglaf characterises Beowulf’s deeds of derring-do as daeda dollicra. Robinson argues that here (uniquely in Old English), the term dollic is being used ironically, and carries a different sense to the implied usages elsewhere in the poem (dolgilp, dolsceapa): ‘audacious’ ‘bold’. Such special pleading would be more convincing were this the only occasion on which Wiglaf appears to criticise his dead lord, but the opening words of Wiglaf’s penultimate speech seem still more unequivocal (lines 3077–84a): ‘Oft sceall eorl monig anes willan wræc adreogan, swa us geworden is. Ne meahton we gelæran leofne þeoden, rices hyrde, red ænigne, 3080 þæt he ne grette goldweard þone, lete hyne liegean þær he longe wæs, wicum wunian oð woruldende; heold on heahgesceap. Hord ys gesceawod, grimme gegongen; 3085 þæt gifeðe to swið ðe ðone þeodcyning þyder ontyhte.’

79 Such dialect-forms perhaps lend Wiglaf’s speech a distinctive flavour, although their use in the poem is not restricted to him: the usic form, for example, is used by Hrothgar at line 458b.
80 See further above, p. 213.
82 The manuscript reads adreoged at line 3078a; þeodcyning has been supplied in line 3086a; there is no gap in the manuscript.
Often must many a man suffer grief through the will of one, as has happened to us. We could not suggest to our dear lord, the kingdom’s protector any plan, so that he would not meet that gold-guardian, let him lie where he had been long, stay in his dwelling until the world’s end; he held to a high destiny. The hoard is revealed, grimly gained; the fate was too powerful, that brought the nation’s king there.’] There must be an element of criticism here, where the many suffer because of one extraordinary man (anes, line 3077b), and where in a sense Wiglaf takes on the voice of the poet, marvelling at a heroism that he cannot quite condone. Just as Heremod’s selfish acts appear to have plunged the Danes into the lordless danger they faced before the mysterious arrival of Scyld Scefing at the beginning of the poem, so Beowulf’s own deeds condemn the Geats to a predictably grim future at the poem’s end. Unlike in the case of Heremod, however, the poet seems very careful not to condemn Beowulf in similarly explicit terms.

We can still argue (as I suppose we are supposed to) over the significance of the cursed treasure, or precisely what it means to be lofgeornost (‘most eager for praise’). In considering the great deeds of the pagan past, this poet does not put them entirely beyond criticism, nor yet does he seek to suggest that they are unworthy of sincere celebration. This poet seems all too aware of human limitations, and judiciously suspends judgment. We might do worse than follow his example, however quixotic such a course of action may seem. Indeed, in his overwhelming and deep-felt involvement with and sympathy for the heroic past, the Beowulf-poet seems to have more than a touch of Don Quixote about him, of whom Cervantes says:

In short, he so buried himself in his books that he spent the nights reading from twilight till daybreak, and the days reading from dawn till dark; and so from little sleep and much reading, his brain dried up and he lost his wits. He filled his mind with all that he had read in them, with enchantments, quarrels, battles, challenges, wounds, wooings, loves, torments, and other impossible nonsense; and so deeply did he steep his imagination in the belief that all the fanciful stuff he read was true, that to his mind no history in the world was more authentic.

In attempting to make sense of deeds way back then (in geardagum) in a foreign land (Gar-Dena), and in celebrating a hero who who was the greatest at that time (þam dægum) and in this life (þisses lifes), the Beowulf-poet carefully

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83 Attempts to explain the term anes as referring here to the dragon or the thief (see, for example, Mitchell and Robinson, ed., Beowulf, p. 157) seem all the more unconvincing given the poet’s consistent characterisation of Beowulf (and indeed Beowulf’s own characterisation of himself) as ‘unique’ (ana), on which see further above, p. 213.
86 See above, pp. 255–6.
88 See above, pp. 180–1.
89 Cohen, trans., Don Quixote, p. 32.
views his subject through a number of distancing lenses, and yet still produces a work which casts light on his own world and which (even through the further lenses of time and translation) can still do the same for us today. Is *Beowulf*, then, in any sense beyond criticism? Like so many of the questions that the poem poses, it may be that the answer is that there is no final answer: it depends on the audience-perspective.\(^90\) One is left in sheer admiration of this deeply layered and textured work, the resonances of which remain long after it is read or heard read: it is not so much that *Beowulf* is beyond criticism, but rather that any all-embracing solution to the poem’s mysteries remains, for the moment at least, clearly beyond its critics.\(^91\)

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\(^91\) For a range of brief attempts to give an overview of the poem, see, for example, Clark, *Beowulf*; Kaske, ‘*Beowulf*’; Robinson, ‘*Beowulf*’; Smithers, ‘The Making of *Beowulf*’; Stanley, ‘*Beowulf*’. 
A hundred years from now, a reader of *Beowulf*, should such an exotic creature still exist, will have access to a vast array of material unimaginable today. And much of that access will be instant. Even now, at the turn of the twentieth century, a well-equipped (which is to say well-funded) scholar can easily travel the world carrying not only the entire surviving corpus of Old English, but also vast bibliographies, together with books and articles complete and in progress, large numbers of downloaded dissertations, and a range of high quality manuscript-facsimiles, all collected together on a laptop computer that can be plugged into the internet to gain relatively speedy access not merely to friends and colleagues for questioning, commiseration, and companionship, but to a splendid array of library-catalogues, bibliographies, and other multimedia resources. In the future (and the not-so-distant future, if we are to believe the cyber-prophets who have virtually predicted it already), almost every would-be reader of *Beowulf* will have access to much more information than anyone today, in a much more compact form, and all at the click of a button, or (since doubtless buttons will seem quite quaint by then) at least in the wink of an eye.

All of the great collaborative projects now in progress, such as *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, *SASLC: Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, and the *Dictionary of Old English*, will be long finished, available instantly, and likely undergoing long-term revision (if the funding is available, naturally); others now planned or in embryonic form, such as a complete database of formulaic phrasing in Old English and Anglo-Latin, or a comprehensive searchable bibliography of Anglo-Saxon studies, will simply be taken for granted. Every new edition will as a matter of course preserve the editorial emendations of the past, alongside a range of translations, recordings, facsimiles, notes, and commentaries. Electronic facsimiles of every item in Helmut Gneuss’s doubtless still standard *Handlist* will have been published (if that is then the right term) in time for the centenary celebrations, each one prefaced by a learned discussion that assigns date and provenance not so much on palaeographical, codicological, or art-historical grounds, as on a chemical analysis of the ink and a microscopic DNA-analysis of the poor creatures first flayed in its production.

More Old English will be known, recovered from binding-strips and fragments in much later books put to repair, alongside a handful of larger serendipitous discoveries in obscure and unlikely places. More too will have turned up in the likeliest of places, lost or unrecognised in libraries inaccessible for long
periods or seldom visited for one reason or another. Much closer study of the activities of the earliest Anglo-Saxon scholars of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries will reveal in their early annotations and transcriptions of manuscripts now lost still more Old English unknown today; and amidst much rejoicing the original manuscript of the Finnsburh fragment will (let us hope) be recovered, still in the back of the book where Wanley placed it for safe-keeping after copying it all those years before.

More too will be known about the Old English we do have. The large amount that even now languishes in the critical apparatuses of all or most editions, or sits unprinted in manuscript, unregarded by most (and certainly no part of the collected corpus as it now stands), will by then have been welcomed back into the fold. We will know more about the different varieties and registers of Old English, and in particular about the idiolects expressed by individual authors, scribes, texts, manuscripts, and even schools. A broad consensus will (perhaps) have been reached on the scansion of Beowulf (though not on the fact or nature of any likely musical accompaniment), but (as now) individual scholars will still quibble about the propriety of individual conjectural emendations, which will be measured against a complete and detailed database of scribal corrections and suggested emendations of every extant Old English text.

A spurt of much-needed parallel editorial activity in that vast area of unprinted medieval texts not only in Latin but in a range of vernaculars (especially Irish and Old Norse-Icelandic) will shed great light on the intellectual and cultural background of Beowulf. The possible influence on Beowulf of Christian-Latin school-text authors, the debt to whom of Old English poets such as Cynewulf will have long since been demonstrated, will become a topic of close study. Analogues to Beowulf will be much more widely sought, as a direct consequence of wider familiarity with the text by students whose first language is not necessarily English. The precise nature of the relationships between Beowulf and an ever-growing range of other Old English texts both in prose and verse will continue to be investigated, even though the relative chronology of Old English poems and their supposed interdependence will have been established long before.

In short, we can be sure both that more will be known and that there will be more to know about Beowulf in the century ahead: the intensive academic study of Beowulf will be a distinct possibility (if not a choice) for a far broader spectrum of prospective readers from a greater variety of backgrounds than ever before. This highly necessary (and highly desirable) democratisation of information will doubtless have a profound impact on the way Beowulf is read, taught, and studied. Old English studies in general, and Beowulf-studies in particular, have always benefitted from the concentrated activities of a handful of mavericks; and if the future of single-site geographically localised universities looks uncertain, prospects have never been brighter for the solitary scholar. The real engagements will take place, as now, not only with other readers past and present, present and absent, but primarily with the poem itself.

But looking back is a salutary lesson to those who would look ahead: few would have predicted at the end of the nineteenth century, when the overwhelming proportion of serious scholarship on Beowulf was being conducted by
Germans in German, that by the end of the twentieth century the bulk of research would be being carried out in English in North America; global politics are of course what will ultimately decide what gets studied where, but the globalisation of *Beowulf*-studies has had a profoundly positive effect that looks set to continue. With a leap of faith we can perhaps permit ourselves to allow that as long as English remains the dominant language of international electronic communication, then someone somewhere will care where all that English came from. Moreover, if *Beowulf* looks to be increasingly marginalised on university curricula, a century from now we may expect it still to be studied in some other context: surely Seamus Heaney and J. R. R. Tolkien have and will continue to serve the poem well. Certainly, then, *Beowulf* has a future, whatever that future may bring.

For anyone, of any age, it is a strange and strangely awesome thing to stand between worlds, straining to gaze both forward and back. However much faith one has in the future, there is a deep comfort in the things that comforted those we knew and loved before. But there, between worlds, is precisely where the *Beowulf*-poet himself stands, honouring and admiring a past he has outgrown, but pinning all his hopes on what he fervently believes is to come. It is right that as readers of *Beowulf* we should honour those who have read the text before, however much we can no longer have faith in their convictions. Our views too will soon enough seem quaint and myopic, and perhaps in a century’s time the students of our students’ students will crack a wry smile at the assumptions and follies of those of us writing on *Beowulf* today, and do what, after all, we did: read (some of) what was thought and said about *Beowulf* before, and try to say something different and from a different point of view.

A hundred years from now, for all the new data and analyses and hypotheses about *Beowulf* that will doubtless arise, at the heart of it all will still remain the poem itself, still read so many centuries after it was first composed, a poem the meaning of which will even then continue to excite debate and admiration because, like all great works, *Beowulf* still retains enormous power, across the centuries, to move. And if a hundred years from now someone not yet born can perhaps, even ‘in a place far from libraries’, still take pleasure reading *Beowulf*, then surely it seems a future worth looking forward to after all.
## Appendix I: The Foliation of *Beowulf*

Note: The transcriptions here follow those of Kiernan, ed., *Electronic Beowulf*, although the lineation is that of more traditional editions.

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<td>198v</td>
<td>2990a</td>
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<td>195r</td>
<td>199r</td>
<td>3015b</td>
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<td>195v</td>
<td>199v</td>
<td>3041b</td>
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<td>200r</td>
<td>3066b</td>
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<td>3092b</td>
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<tr>
<td>198r</td>
<td>201r</td>
<td>3121b</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>198v</td>
<td>201v</td>
<td>3150b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- modiðaðum sigla fealo gold glitinian
- oð þæthe morðre swealt ar wæs on ofoste
- floda genipu forran drifad dyde him
- æfter lyfte lacende. hwearf middel nih
- des dædum rædan gumena gehwylcum sw
- rag becwom. hu sceal sinc þego þ swyrð
- (d)wearde leofes þaðes nu y
- (f)t gehet earmre teoh he on(d...
- annedóm hyne yrringa wulf won reðing
- leodum þ gelæsta swa geald þone guð ræs geata
- nalles eorl wegan mæðum to ge myndum
- gledum be swæled se wæs fiftiges fot gemearces
- þahe biorges weard sohte searo niðas seolfa
- ut ætbær cyninge minum cwico wæs þagena
- cyniges þegnas sjon
- [g]iatisc anmeowle [b]unden heorde
Appendix II: Repeated Formulas in *Beowulf*

The following Appendix seeks to chart the majority of repeated formulas in *Beowulf*; it does not claim to be exhaustive, but is rather intended to point up the most significant parallels of phrasing, in so far as they might throw light on the poem’s structure or the poet’s compositional technique (or both). I present the lines without punctuation and with minimal capitalisation, highlighting in italics overlapping phrasing, and have indicated suggested emendations with an asterisk (*), in as much as they are derived from formulaic phrasing and have been conjectured by earlier editors; however, the recording of such conjectural emendations here should not necessarily be taken as a sign of an acceptance on my part of their validity. I have only indicated a handful of other conjectural emendations in the lines cited, in so far as they have a bearing on the formulaic character of the lines in question. In all cases of emendation, I have supplied the manuscript-reading in square brackets following the line. This Appendix may be used in conjunction with Appendix III below to identify formulaic phrasing in specific lines.

1 hwæt we Gardena in *geardagum*  
1354 þone on *geardagum* Grendel nemdon  
2233 swa hy on *geardagum* gumena nathwylc

2 *þrym gefrunon*  
2694 ða ic æt þearfe gefrægn* peodcyninges [NOT IN MS]

5 *meodosetla ofteah*  
75 manigre *mægþe geond þisne middangeard*  
1771 manigum *mægþa geond þysne middangeard*

6 *egsode eorlas* syððan ærest weard  
1947 inwitniða syððan ærest weard  

8 weox *under wolcnum* weorðmyndum þah  
651 wan *under wolcnum* werod eall aras  
714 wod *under wolcnum* to þæs þe he winreced

1 Those in search of a much fuller (and sometimes rather speculative) register should consult Creed, ‘Studies in the Techniques of Composition’. Many of formulas and formulaic systems listed here can be augmented with recourse to Bessinger and Smith, *A Concordance to the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*; *idem, A Concordance to Beowulf*; Cook, *A Concordance to Beowulf* [details of which are in section B of the Bibliography].

2 See further the discussion above, pp. 42–56.
1631 waeter under wolcnum wældreore fag
1770 weold under wolcnum ond hig wigge beleac

9 oðþæt him æghwylc þara ymbesittendra
2734 ymbesittendra ænig ðara

11 gomban gyldan þæt wæs god cyning
863 glædne Hroðgar ac þæt wæs god cyning
2390 geatum wealdan þæt wæs god cyning

16 lange hwile him þæs lifrea
2159 leod Scyldunga lange hwile
2780 lange hwile ligegesan wæg

17 wuldras wealdend woroldare forgeaf
183 wuldras waldend wa bið þæm ðe sceal
1752 wuldras waldend weorðmynda dæl

29 swæse gesiðas swa he selfa bæd
1934 swæsra gesiða nefne sinfrea
2040 swæse gesiðas ond hyra sylfra feorh
2518 swæse gesiðas nolde ic sweord beran

30 þenden wordum weold wine Scyldinga
148 wine Scyldinga* weana gehwelcne [MS scyldenda]
170 þæt wæs wræc micel wine Scyldinga
1183 wine Scyldinga worold oflætest
1418 winum Scyldinga weorce on mode
2026 hafað þæs geworden wine Scyldinga
2101 me þone wælræs wine Scyldunga

32 þær æt hyðe stod hringedstefna
1131 hringedstefnan holm storme weol
1897 hladen herewædum hringedstefna

34 aledon þa leofne þeoden
3079 ne meahton we gelæran leofne þeoden

aledon þa leofne þeoden
beaga bryttan on bearm scipes
34–6 mærne be mæste þær wæs madma fela
aledon ða tommeldes mærne þeoden
3141–2 hæleð hiofende hlaford leofne

35 beaga bryttan on bearm scipes
352 beaga bryttan swa þu bena eart
896 bær on bearm scipes beorhte frætwa
beaga bryttan  beac þonne moste
billum ond byrnum  him on bearne læg
bill ond byran  oddæt his byre mihte
madma mænigo  þa him mid scoldon
maðma menigeo  maga Healfdenes
þeodgestreonom  þon þa dydon
þeodgestreona*  ond geþeoh tela  [MS þeo ge streona]
þe hine æt frumsceafte  forð onsendon
fela feorh cynna  forð onsended
ænne ofer yðe  umborwesende
umborwesendum ær  arna gefremedon
þa gyt hie him asetton  segen gyldenne*  [MS g . . . denne]
segen gyldenne  sigores to leane
heah ofer heafod  leton holm beran
wyrm ofer weallclif  leton weg niman
geafon on garsecg  him wæs geomor sefa
goldwine geata  him wæs geomor sefa
sægde gesiðum  him wæs sefa geomor
murnende mod  men ne cunnon
mistige moras  men ne cunnon
secgan to soðe  selerædende*  [MS sele rædenne]
selerædende  secgan hyrde
hæleð under heofenum  hwa þæm hlæste onfeng
gehedde under heofenum  þonne he sylfa
leof leodcyning  lange þrage
lange þrage  he him ðæs lean forgeald
lifde æfter laþum  lange þrage
gamol ond guðreowu  glæde Scyldingas
gamolfeax ond guðrof  geoce gelyfde
wiges weorðmynd  þæt him his winemagas
wigena weorðmynd  þæt wæs wæpna cyst
geongum ond ealdum  swylc him god sealde
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123 þritig þegna þanon eft gewat
853 þanon eft gewiton ealdgesiðas

124 huðe hremig to ham faran
1882 since hremig sægenga bad
2054 frætwum hremig on flet gæð

125 mid þære wælfylle wica neosan
1125 gewiton him ða wigend wica neosian

129 micel morgensweg mære þeoden
201 mærne þeoden þa him wæs manna þearf
345 mærum þeodne min ærende
353 þeoden mærne ymb þinne sið
797 mæres þeodnes ðær hie meahton swa
1046 swa manlice mære þeoden
1598 mærne þeoden þa ðæs monige gewearð
1715 mære þeoden mondreamum from
1992 mærum þeodne ic ðæs modceare
2384 mærne þeoden him þæt to mearce wearð
2572 mærum þeodne þonne his myne sohte
2721 þeoden mærne þegn ungemete till
2788 he ða mid þam madmum mærne þioden
3141 alegdon ða tommodes mærne þeoden

130 æþeling ærgod unblide sæt
1329 æþeling ærgod swylc Æschere wæs
2342 æþeling ærgod ende gebidan

133 wergan gastes wæs þæt gewin to strang
191 wean onwendan wæs þæt gewin to swyð
1747 wom wundorbebodum wergan gastes

wergan gastes wæs þæt gewin to strang
133–4 lað ond longsum næs hit lengra fyrst
191–2 lap ond longsum þæ on ða leode becom

137 fæhðe ond fyrene wæs to fæst on þam
153 fyrene ond fæhðe fela missera
879 fæhðe ond fyrene buton fitela mid hine
2480 fæhðe ond fyrene swa hyt gefræge wæs

141 gesægd soðlice sweotolan tacne
833 torn unlytel þæt wæs tacen sweotol

146 husa selest wæs seo hwil micel
on heahstede  *husa selest*
haða nu ond geheald  *husa selest*
*husa selest* heorodreorig stod

wine Scyldinga  *weana gehwelcne*
*weana gehwylces* swa ic þe wene to

*ylda bearum* undyrne cuð
on minre eþeltyrf  *undyrne cuð*
ofer *ylda bear* oþres dogores

fyrene ond fæhðe  *fela missera*
he frætwe geheold  *fela missera*

feorhbealo feorran  *fea þingian*
siððan þa fæhðe  *feo þingode*

ac* se* æglæca ehtende wæs  [GAP AT EDGE OF MS]
*atol æglæca* ealdre þinum
*atol æglæca* anra gehwylces
*atol æglæca* him on eaxle wearð

deorc deaþscua  *duguþe ond geogoþe*
duguþe ond geogoþe  dæl æghwylcne
duguðe ond iogope  þæt þu him ondrædan ne þearft

swa fela fyrena  *feond mancynnes*
mancynnes feond  ond his modor þa gyt

*atol angengea* oft gefremede
eatolne inwitscear  *oft gefremedon*  [MS ge gefremedon]

no he þone gifstol  *gretan moste*
þæt we hine swa godne  *gretan moton*

wið færgryrum  *to gefremmanne*
to gefremmanne  folces hyrde

þæt him gastbona  *geoce gefremede*
geongum garwigan  *geoce gefremman*

wið þeodþreaum  swylc wæs þeaw hyra
þrecwudu þrymlic  *wæs þeaw hyra*

ne hie *huru* heofena helm  *herian* ne cuþon
ne *huru* Hildeburh  *herian* þorfte
æfter deaðdæge
drihten secean

dom unlytel

swa ða mælceare maga Healfdenes
geþenc nu se mæra maga Healfdenes
mago Healfdenes maþmas xii
sona me se mæra mago Healfdenes
maðma menigeo maga Healfdenes

þæt fram ham gefrægn Higelaces þegn
heard be hiltum Higelaces ðegn
let se hearda Higelaces þegn

se wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest
on þæm dæge þysses lifes
se þe manna wæs mægene strengest

on þæm dæge þysses lifes

on þæm dæge þysses lifes
on þæm dæge þysses lifes
on þæm dæge þysses lifes

of er swanrade secean wolde

sunu healfdenes secean wolde

mærne þeoden þa him wæs manna þearf
þæt he sigehreðig secean come
mærne þeoden þa ðæs monige gewearð

mærne þeoden þa him wæs manna þearf
mægenes fultum þær de bið manna þearf

ðone siðfæt him snotere ceorlas
þa selestan snotere ceorlas
sona þæt gesawon snottre ceorlas

lythwon logon þeah he him leof wære
laðum dædum þeah him leof ne waes

hæfde se goda Geata leoda
we synt gumcynnes Geata leode
of er geofenes begang Geata leode
in þæm guðsele Geotena leode
æfter guð sceare Geata leode
Geata leodum ond Gar denum
ne to gneæð gifa Geata leodum
2318 hu se guðseacða Geata leode
2927 Geata leode Guðscilfingas
3137 him ða gegiredan Geata leode
3178 swa begunornodon Geata leode

207 findan mihte xvna sum
1156 swylec hie æt finnes ham findan meahton
1378 frecne stowe dær þu findan miht
2373 no ðy ær feasceafte findan meahton
2870 ower feor oððe neah findan mehte
3162 foresnotre men findan mihton

214 on bearn nacan beorhte frætwe
896 bær on bearn scipes beorhte frætwa

214–15 guðsearo geatolic guman ut scufon
beran ofer bolcan beorhte randas
231–2 fyrdsearu fuslicu hine fyrwyt bræc
896 bær on bearn scipes beorhte frætwa

217 gewat þa ofer vægholm winde gefysed
630 ond þa gyddode guþe gefysed
2309 fyre gefysed wæs se fruma egeslic
2561 ða wæs hringbogan heorte gefysed

218 flota famiheals fugle gelicost
727 ligge gelicost leohht unfæger
985 stiðra nægla gehwylc style gelicost
1608 þæt hit eal gemealt ise gelicost
1909 fleat famigheals forð ofer yðe

219 oðþæt ymb antid opres dogores
605 ofer ylda bearn opres dogores

225 Wedera leode on wang stigon
697 wigspeda gewiofu Wedera leodum
1894 cwæð þæt wilcumæn Wedera leodum
2900 nu is wilgeofa Wedra leoda
3156 geworhton ða Wedra leode

227 guðgewædo gode þancedon
625 grette geata leod gode þancode
1397 ahleop ða se gomela gode þancode
1626 eodon him þa togeanes gode þancodon
2617 his gædelinges guðgewædu
2623 geaf him ða mid geatum guðgewæda
guðgewædu þær me gifedǝ swa
guðgewædu þær se gomela læg
þæt he genunga gedgewædu

se þe holmcılu healdan scolde
þa þæt hornreced healdan scoldon

fyrdsearu fuslicu hine fyrwyt brǝc
fægre fricgcean hyne fyrwet brǝc
fyrdsearo fuslic no ymbe ða ðæhǝ sprǝc
frætwum gefyrǝred hyne fyrwet brǝc

byrnum werede þe þus brontne ceol
gebide ge on beorge byrnum werede
þe on land Dena laðra nænig
leassceaweras on land Dena

lindhæbbende ne ge leafnesword
lindhæbbendra lastas wǝron

guðfreemmendra gearwe ne wisson
goldsele gumena gearwost wisse
þara þe gumena bearn gearwe ne wiston

secg on searwum nis þæt selgdumǝ
secgas on searwum hwæǝer sel mǝge
secg on searwum þæt ðæt sweord gedeaf

wæpnum geweorǝd nǝfne him his wǝlte leoge
wæpnum gewurǝd þa dǝr wlonc hæleð

frumcyn witan ær ge fyr heonǝn
under foldan nis þæt fǝor heonon

anfealdne gǝboht ofost is selest
eorlscep efinǝ nu* is ofost betost [MS me]

him se yldesta ondswarode
him þa ellenrof andswarode

ond Higelaces heorðgeneatas
þonne he Hroðgares heorðgeneatas
heorðgeneatas nǝs him hroeh sefa
þenden hǝelo abead heorðgeneatum
hlafǝordes hryre heorðgeneatas
æþele ordfruma

wæs his ealdfæder

witenæ welhwylc

wigend weorðfullost

sunu Healfdenes secean cwomon

wille ic asecgan

sunu Healfdenes secean wolde

þæt to healle gang Healfdenes sunu

ðonne sweorda gelac sunu Healfdenes

þæt he sigehredig secean come

hwæt we þæs sælac sunu Healfdenes

sunu Healfdenes swigedon ealle

sunu Healfdenes on minne sylfes dom

Deniga frean ne sceal þær dyrne sum

Deniga frean cuþe he duguðe þeaw

æfter deofla hryre Denigea frean

swa we soplice secgan hyrdon

swylcra searoniða secgan hyrde

þæt he fram sigemundes secgan hyrde

selerædende secgan hyrde

ac he sodlice sægde ofer ealle

deogol dædhata deorcum nihtum

deorcum nihtum draca ricsian

ond þa cearwyłmas colran wurðaþ

æfter cearwælmum colran weordāþ

worda ond worca se þe wel penceð

wordum ne worcum ware ne bræce

wordum* ond worcum þæt ic þe wel herige [MS weordum]

wiht onwendan þam þe wel penceð

freen Scyldinga gewitaþ forð beran

freen Scildinga frinan wille

þe æt fotum sæt freen Scyldinga

wæpen ond gewædu ic eow wisige

wundur under wealle ic eow wisige

arum healdan oþðæt eft byreð

arum heolde þæt ðær ængig mon

arum healdan gyf þu ær þonne he
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297 ofer lagustreamas  leofne mann
1915 se þe ær lange tid  leofra manna
1943 æfter ligetorne  leofne mann
1994 leofes mannes  ic ðe lange bæd
2080 leofes mannes  lic eall forswelalg
2127 leofne mannan  hio þæt lic ætbær
2897 leofes monnes  lyt swigode
3108 leofne mannan  þær he lange sceal
302–3 seomode on sale*  sidfæþmed scip  [MS onsole]
308 geatolic ond goldfah  ongyton mihton
1496 ær he þone grundwong  ongytan mehte
1911 þæt hie geata clifu  ongitan meahton
2770 þæt he þone grundwong  ongitan meahte
309 þæt wæs foremærost  foldbuendum
1355 foldbuende  no hie fæder cunnon
311 lixte se leoma  ofer landa fela
1570 lixte se leoma  leoht inne stod
315 wicg gewende  word after cwæð
341 wlanc wedera leod  word after spræc
321 gumum ætgædere  guðbyrne scan
405 beowulf maðelode  on him byrne scan
322 heard hondlocen  hringiren scir
551 heard hondlocen  helpe gefremede
327 bugon þa to bence  byrnan hringdon
1013 bugon þa to bence  blædagande
329 sæmanna searo  samod ætgædere
387 seon sibbegedriht  samod ætgædere
729 swefan sibbegedriht  samod ætgædere
1063 þær wæs sang ond sweg  samod ætgædere
332 oretmecgas  æfter æþelum frægn
363 þone yldestan  oretmecgas
481 ofer ealowæge  oretmecgas
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<tr>
<td>336</td>
<td>ar ond ombiht ne seah ic elþeodige</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>weorod wæs on wynne ne seah ic widan feorh</td>
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<td>338</td>
<td>wen ic þæt ge for wlenco nalles for wræcsidum</td>
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<tr>
<td>442</td>
<td>wen ic þæt he wille gif he wealdan mot</td>
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<tr>
<td>508</td>
<td>ðær git for wlence wada cunnedon</td>
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<tr>
<td>1206</td>
<td>syþðan he for wlenco wean ahsode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>342</td>
<td>heard under helme we synt higelaces</td>
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<tr>
<td>404</td>
<td>heard under helme þæt he on heoðe gestod</td>
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<tr>
<td>2539</td>
<td>heard under helme hiorosercean bær</td>
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<td>343</td>
<td>beodgeneatas beowulf is min nama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1713</td>
<td>bret bolgenmod beodgeneatas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>348</td>
<td>Wulfgar mapelode þæt wæs Wendla leod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>360</td>
<td>Wulfgar maðelode to his winedrihtne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>361</td>
<td>her syndon geferede feorran cumene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819</td>
<td>feorran cumene þæt we fundiaþ</td>
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<tr>
<td>366</td>
<td>wordum wrixlan no ðu him wearne geteoh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>874</td>
<td>wordum wrixlan welhwylc gecwæð</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>371</td>
<td>Hroðgar mapelode helm Scyldinga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>456</td>
<td>Hroðgar mapelode helm Scyldinga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1321</td>
<td>Hroðgar mapelode helm Scyldinga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>372</td>
<td>ic hine cuðe cnihtwesende</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>535</td>
<td>wit þæt gecwædon cnihtwesende</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>375</td>
<td>angan dohtor is his eafora nu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2997</td>
<td>ond ða Iofore forgeaf angan dohtor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>381</td>
<td>heaþorof hæbbe hine halig god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1553</td>
<td>herenet hearde ond halig god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>382</td>
<td>for arstafum us onsende</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>458</td>
<td>ond for arstafum usic sohrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>383</td>
<td>to westdenuþæs ic wen hæbbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1578</td>
<td>ðara þe he geworhte to westdenu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3000</td>
<td>wælnið wera ðæs ðe ic wen* hafó [NOT IN MS]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>384</td>
<td>wið Grendles gryre ic þæm godan sceal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>478</td>
<td>on Grendles gryre god eaþe mæg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
beo ðu on ofeste hat in gan
bio nu on ofoste þæt ic ærwelan

Deniga leodum
leode Deniga ac he lust wigeð
Denigea leode ac him dryhten forgæaf
Denigea leodum dead is Æschere
ond to deaðcwalum Deniga leodum
daðwerigne Denia leode

heardhicgende hider wilcuman
heardhicgende hildemecgas

under heregriman Hroðgar geseon
under heregriman hindeman síde
under heregriman hat þrowian

þryðlic þegna heap sume þær bidon
dryðlic þegna heap þeodnes gefegon

þa me þæt gelærđon leode mine
forþan he to lange leode mine
ic þæt londbuend leode mine
þæs ðe ic moste minum leodum
se scel to gemyndum minum leodum

þa selestan snottre ceorlas
bone selestan sawolleasne
dæm selestan be sæm tweonum
bone* selestan bi sæm tweonum [MS þæs]
bone selestan sæcyninga

þa selestan snottre ceorlas
beoden Hroðgar þæt ic þe sohte
sona þæt gesawon snottre ceorlas
þæs ðe mid Hroðgare on holm wliton

wræc wedera nið wean ahsodon
syðan he for wlenco wean ahsode

brego beorhtdena biddan wille
þæt hie in beorsele bidan woldon
brego beorhtdena gehyrde on beowulfæ
bidan wolde brimwylm onfeng
bidan wolde ac mid bæle for

eodor Scyldinga anre bene
663 eodur Scyldinga ut of healle

429 þæt ðu me ne forwyrne wigendra hleo
899 ofer werþeode wigendra hleo
1972 þæt ðær on worðig wigendra hleo
2337 heht him þa gewyrcean wigendra hleo

430 freowine folca nu ic þus feorran com
2357 freawine folca freslondum on
2429 freawine folca æt minum fædergenam

437 þæt ic sweord bere ofðe sidne scyld
325 setton sæmeþe side scyldas

441 dryhtnes dome se þe hine deað nimeð
452 onsend higelace gif mec hild nime
447 dreore fahne gif mec deað nimeð
1436 sundes þe sænra ðe hyne swylt fornam
1481 hondgesellum gif mec hild nime
1491 dom gewyrce ofðe mec deað nimeð
2536 gold gegangan oððe guð nimeð

442 wen ic ðæt he wille gif he wealdan mot
2038 þenden hie ðam wæpnum wealdan moston
2574 wealdan moste swa him wyrd ne gescraf
2827 wyrm wohbogen wealdan ne moste
2984 þæt hie wælstowe wealdan moston

443 in þæm guðsele Geotena leode
2139 in þam guðsele* Grendeles modor [MS sele]

446 hafalan hydan ac he me habban wile
1372 hafelan hydan* nis þæt heoru stow [NOT IN MS]

457 for gewyrhtum þu wine min Beowulf
1704 geond widwegas wine min Beowulf

460 wearþ he Heaþolafe to handbonan
1330 wearð him on Heorote to handbanan
2502 to handbonan Huga cempan

463 þanon he gesohte Suðdena folc
520 ðanon he gesohte swæsne .X.

464 ofer ýda gewealc Arscyldinga
1710 eafórum Ecgwelan Arscyldingum
465 dā ic furþum weold  folce Denīgā* [MS denīnga]
1582 folces Denīgēa  fyftyne men

467 burh hæleþa  dā wæs Heregar dead
2372 caldan cuðe  dā wæs Hygelac dead

468 min yldra mæg  unligigende
744 unligigendes  eal gefeormod
1389 unligigendum  āfter selest
2908 eorl ofer oðrum  unligigendum

470 sīðān þa fæhðe  feo þingode
1380 ic þe þa fæhðe  feo leanige

474 gumena ængum  hwæt me Grendel hafað
2416 to gegangenne  gumena ænīgum
3054 gumena ænīg  nefne god sylfa

475 hynðo on Heorote  mid his heteþancum
593 hynðo on Heorote  gif þin hige wære

477 wigheap gewanod  hie wyrd forsweop
2814 Wægmundinga  ealle wyrd forsweop* [MS for speof]

478 on Grendles gryre  god eāpe mæg
2764 searwum gesæled  sinc eāpe mæg

480 ful oft gebeotedon  beore druncne
531 beore druncen  ymb Brecon spræce
1467 wine druncen  þa he þæs wæpnes onlah

488 deorre duguðe  þe þa deāð fornām
695 in þæm winsele  wældeāð fornām
2119 sīðode sorhfull  sunu deāð fornām
2236 deore maðmas  ealle hie deāð fornām
2249 gode begeaton  guðdeāð fornām

492 on beorsele  benc gerymed
1094 on beorsele  byldan wolde
2635 in biorsele  þe us ðas beagas geaf

494 þryðum dealle  þegn nytte beheold
667 seleweard aseted  sundornynte beheold
3118 scoc ofer scildweall  sceft nytte heold

500 þe æt fotum sæt  frean Scyldinga
1166 æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga  gehwylc hiora his ferhþe treowde
æfre mærða þon ma middangeardes
þæt he ne mette middangeardes
mon on middangearde syððan hie ða mærða geslogan

aldrum néþdon ne inc ænig mon
aldrum néðdon ond þæt geæfndon swa

sorhfullne sið þa git on sund reon
hæfdon swurd nacod þa wit on sund reon
sorhfulne sið sunu deað* wrecan [MS þeod]
sorhfulne sið on seglrade
siðode sorhfull sunu deað fornam

Beowulf mapelode bearn Ecgþeowes
Beowulf mapelode bearn Ecgþeowes
Beowulf mapelode bearn Ecþeowes
Beowulf maþelode bearn Ecþeowes
Biowulf maþelode bearn Ecgþioes
Biowulf mapelade bearn Ecgþeowes

hwæt þu worn fela wine min Unferð
wiggeweorþad unc sceal worn fela
werian þohton no he wiht fram me
wadu weallendu no ic wiht fram þe

wado weallende wedera cealdost
wadu* weallendu no ic wiht fram þe [MS wudu]
nipende niht ond norþanwind
oðþe nipende niht ofer ealle

heard hondlocen helpe gefremede
nemne him heaðobyrne helpe gefremede
golde gegyrwed me to grunde teah
golde gegyrede gummanna fela
golde gegyrede næs mid geatum ða

grim on grape hwæpre me gyfþe wearð
hwæbere me gesælde þæt ic mid sweorde ofsloh

hildebille heaþoræs fornam
hildebille hond sweng ne ofteah
559 swa mec gelome  laðgeteonan
974 no ðy leng leofað  laðgeteona

561 *deoran sweorde  swa hit gedefe wæs
1670 deaðcwealm denigea  swa hit gedefe wæs
3048 discas lagon  ond dyre swyrð
3174 *duguðum demdon  swa hit gedefe* bið*  [MS ǧd . . . ]

562 næs hie ðære fylle  gefean haefdon
2740 feorbhennum seoc  gefean habban

565 ac on mergenne  mecum wunde
2939 cwæð he on mergenne  meces ecgum

571 *þæt ic sænæssas  geseon mihte
648 siððan hie sunnan leoht  geseon meahton
961 *þæt ðu hine selfne  geseon moste
1078 ða heo under swegłe  geseon meahte
1628 *þæs he hi hyne gesundne  geseon moston
1875 *þæt hie* seoððan no  geseon moston  [MS he seoðð . . . ]
1911 *þæt hie* Geata clifu  ongitan meahton
1998 *þæs de ic de gesundne  geseon moste

576 *under heofones hwealf  heardran feohtan
2015 under heofones hwealf  healsittendra

578 hwætere ic fara feng  feore gedigde
661 gif þu þæt ellenweorc  aldre gedigest
1655 ic þæt unsofte  ealdre gedigde

579 *sipes werig  ða mec sæ oþbær
1794 sona him seleþegn  sides wergum

585 swa deorlice  daed gefremede
940 þurh drihtnes miht  daed gefremede
954 daedum gefremed  þæt þin dom lyfað

587 þeah ðu þinum broðrum  to banan wurde
2203 under bordhreoðan  to bonan wurdon

590 secge ic þe to soðe  sunu Ecglafes
980 ða wæs swigra secg  sunu Eclafes
1808 sunu Ecglafes  heht his sweord niman

597 swiðe onsittan  Sigescyldinga
2004 Sigescyldingum  sorge gefremede
A Critical Companion to ‘Beowulf’

2516 gegrette ða gumena gehwylcne

653 Hroðgar Beowulf ond him hæl abead
654 winærnes geweald ond þæt word acwæð
659 gemyne mærpo maegenellen cyð
660 waca wið wraþum ne bið þe wilna gad niwe sibbe ne bið þe nænigra gad
662 ða him Hroþgar gewat mid his hæleþa gedryht
663 ond him Hroþgar gewat to hofe sinum
666 helm of hafelan sealde his hyrsted sweord
667 iarena cyst ombiþegne geseted ond gesæd hwam þæt sweord geworht
669 iarena cyst ærest wäre
670 ond gehealdan het hildegeatwe
672 Beowulf Geata ær he on bed stige
673 iarena cyst ombiþegne
674 ond gehealdan het hildegeatwe
679 ænig ofer eorþan irena cyst
680 on gylpspræce guðgeweorca
681 guðgeweorca iċ beo gearo sona
688 mærðo deme swa him gemet þince
689 frofor ond fultum þæt hie feond heora

2418 þenden hælo abead heorðgeneatum
2046 wigbealu wececean ond þæt word acwyp
2678 mærða gemunde mægenstrengo sloh [MS m . . . ]
1530 mærða gemyndig mæg Hylaces
1559 wigena weorðomynd þæt wæs* wæpna cyst [NOT IN MS]
1696–7 iarena cyst ærest wære
1697 iarena cyst ærest wære
1349–50 worulde wilna þæt ic geweald hæbbe
949–50 worulde wilna þæt ic geweald hæbbe
1236 ond him Hroþgar gewat to hofe sinum
1273 frofre ond fultum ðy he þone feond ofercwom
701 þæt mihtig god manna cynnes
712 mynte se manscaða manna cynnes
735 þæt he ma moste manna cynnes
810 modes myrðe manna cynne
914 mæg Higelaces manna cynne
1716 ðeah þe hine mihtig god mægenes wynnum
1725 hu mihtig god manna cynne

706 þæt hie ne moste þa metod nolde
967 ic hine ne mihte þa metod nolde

713 sumne besyrwan in sele þam hean
919 swiðhicgende to sele þam hean
1016 swiðhicgende on sele þam hean
1984 sinne geseldan in sele þam hean

716 fættum fahne ne wæs þæt forma sið
1463 folcstede fara næs þæt forma sið
1527 fæges fyrdhrægl ða wæs forma sið
2625 frod on forðweg þa wæs forma sið

721 dreamum bedæled duru sona onarn
1275 dreame bedæled deāwic seon

723 onbraed þa bealohydig ða he* gebolgen* wæs
[MS he ge VERY FADED]
1539 brægd þa beadwe heard þa he gebolgen wæs
[MS gebolge . . .]
2220 bufolc beorna þæt he gebolgen* wæs
2550 let ða of breostum ða he gebolgen wæs

732 atol aglæca anra gehwylces
784 atelic egesa anra gehwylcum

733 lif wið lice þa him alumpen wæs
2423 lif wið lice no þon lange wæs
2571 life ond lice læsann hwile
2743 lif of lice nu ðu lungre geong

737 mæg Higelaces hu se manscaða
758 gemunde þa se goda mæg Higelaces
813 ac hine se modega mæg Hygelaces
914 mæg Higelaces manna cynne

740 ac he gefeng hraðe forman siðe
2286 fira fyrngeweorc forman siðe
sona þæt onfunde fyrena hyrde
ða þæt onfunde se þe fela æror
sona þæt onfunde se þe floda begong
secg synbysig sona þæt* onfunde* [MS mwatide]

mynte se mæra þær* he meahte swa [MS ILLEGIBLE AT EDGE]
mæres þeodnes ðær hie meahton swa

widre gewidan ond on weg þanon
hu he werigmod on weg þanon

dryhtsele dynede Denum eallum wearð
dogera þægrim Denum eallum wearð
.Ẋ. Scyldinga he þær eallum wearð
dreorig ond gedrefed Denum eallum wæs

medubenc monig mine gefræge
då wæs on morgen mine gefræge
ealles moncynnes mine gefræge
se þe meca gehwane mine gefræge
mægenagendra mine gefræge

swulge on swaþule sweg up astag
þonon yðgeblond up astigeð

grýreleoð galan godes ondsacan
gromheort guma godes ondsaca

nolde eorla hleo ænige pinga
heht ða eorla hleo eahta mearas
då git him eorla hleo inne gesealde
ele neeoodon to þæs de eorla hleo
ac me eorla hleo eft gesealde
het ða eorla hleo in gefetian
ær þam æðelinge ænige ðinga
on þam aglæcean ænige þinga

eorl Beowulfes ealde lafe
ond þu Unferð læt ealde lafe
ealde lafe on þæm wæs or writen

wolde freadrihtnes feorh ealgian
fæne gefyllan feorh ealgian
feorh ealgian ic ðe fullæstu

wolde freadrihtnes feorh ealgian
mæres þeodnes ðær hie meahton swa
fane gefyllan  feorh ealgian
2655–6  wedra ðeodnes  ic wat geare

801  sawle secan  þone synscæðan
2820  sawol secean  sóðfæstra dom

808  on feonda geweald  feor síðian
903  on feonda geweald  forð forlacen

814  hæfde be honda  wæs gehwæþer oðrum
2171  ond gehwæþer oðrum  hroþra gemyndig

824  æfter þam wælraese  willa gelumpen
2531  æfter wælraese  wunde gedygan

827  genered wið niðe  nihtweorce gefeh
1569  sweord wæs swatig  secg weorce gefeh

828  ellenmærpum  hæfde eastdenum
1471  ellenmærðum  ne wæs þæm oðrum swa

831  inwidsorge  þe hie ær drugon
1858  inwitiþas  þe hie ær drugon

835  earm ond eaxle  þær wæs eal geador
972  earm ond eaxle  no þær ænige swa þeah

839  ferdon folctogan  feorran ond nean
1174  nean ond feorran  þu nu hafast
2317  nearofages nið  nean ond feorran

840  geond widwegas  wundor sceawian
1704  geond widwegas  wine min Beowulf
3032  wollenteare  wundor sceawian

848  atol yða geswing  eal gemenged
1593  þæt wæs yðgeblond  eal gemenged

849  haton heolfre  heorodreore weol
1423  hatan heolfre  horn stundum song

858  þætte suð ne norð  be sæm tweonum
1297  on gesiðes had  be sæm tweonum
1685  ðæm seleston  be sæm tweonum
1956  þone* seleston  bi sæm tweonum  [MS þæs]

þætte suð ne norð  be sæm tweonum
858–9 ofer eormengrund ofer nænig

860 under swegles begong sela nære

865 on gefliit faran fealwe mearas

870 worn gemunde word ofer fand

871 sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian

872 sið Beowulfes snude gecyðed

874 wordum wrixlan welhwylc gecwæð

876 ellendaedum uncuþes fela

877 hordes hyrde he under harne stan

888 æbelinges bearne ana geneðde

892 dryhtlic iren draca morðre swealt

894 þæt he beahhordes brucan moste

895 þæt he wintrum frod worn gemunde

900 ellendaedum he þæs ær onðah

916 hwilum flitende fealwe stræte

923 cystum gecyped ond his cwæn mid him

924 þonne he wintrum frod worn gemunde

931 æþelinges bearne ana geneðde

932 ofereode þa æþelinga bearne

941 middelnihtum oðfæt he morðre swealt

945 dragdraca morðre swealt

950 æþelinga bearne ymba gestodon

957 heaðotorht hlynnan under harne stan

964 æþelinga bearne ealra twelfe

971 æþelinga bearne ealra twelfe

987 elne geeodon þæs ær onðah

1005 he þæs ær onðah

1022 æþelinges bearne ana geneðde
895  *selfes dome*  sæbat gehleod
2776  *sylfes dome*  segn eac genom

907  swylce oft bemearn  ærran mælum
2237  ærran mælum  ond se an ða gen
3035  ærran mælum  þa wæs endedæg

910  þæt þæt ðednes bearn  geþeon scolde
1837  geþingeð peodnes bearn  he mæg þær fela

920  searowundor seon  swylce self cyning
1365  þær mæg nihta gehwæm  niðwundor seon

933  weana ne wende  to widan feore
2014  werod wæs on wynne  ne seah ic widan feorh

934  bote gebidan  þonne blode fah
1594  brim blode fah  blondenfeaxe
2974  þæt he blode fah  bugan sceolde

946–7  secg betsta  me for sunu wylle
1758–9  secg betsta  ond þe þæt selre geceos

950  worolde wilna  þe ic geweald hæbbe
1610  onwindeð wælrapas  se geweald hafað

956  gode forgylde  swa he nu gyt dyde
1058  gumena cynnes  swa he nu git deð
1134  gear in geardas  swa nu gyt deð
1824  gumena dryhten  þonne ic gyt dyde
2859  gumena gehwylcum  swa he nu gen deð

961  þæt ðu hine selfne  geseon moste
1605  selfne gesawon  þa þæt swoerd organ
1628  þæs þe hi hyne gesundne  geseon moston
1875  þæt hie seoddan no  geseon moston
1998  þæs ðe ic ðe gesundne  geseon moste

963  ic hine hrædlice  heardan clammum
1335  þurh hæstne had  heardum clammum

969  feorhgeniðlan  wæs to foremihtig
1540  feorhgeniðlan  þæt heo on flet gebeah
2933  ond ða folgode  feorhgeniðlan
to lifwraþe  last weardian
lungre gelice  last weardode

no þy leng leofað  laðgeteona
se ðe lengest leofað  laðan cynnes

sipðan æþelingas  eorles cræfte
idel hweorfan  syððan æþelingas

hæþenes handsporu  hilderinces*  [MS hild . . derinces]
hilderince  ða wæs hwil dæges
hilderince  ac he hraþe wolde

iren ærgod  þæt ðæs ahlæcan
iren ærgod  ne wæs ðæt eðe sið

aldres orwena  no þæt yðe byð
aldres orwena  yrringa sloh

ymb hyra sincgyfan  sel gebærnan
on hyra sincgyfan  sare geendod

fylle gefægon  fægere gepægon
fylle gefægnod*  heo þa fæhðe wræc  [MS ge frægn]

hroden hildecumbar  helm ond byrnan
ða wæs of þæm hroran  helm ond byrne
healsittendum  helm ond byrnan

sadol searwum fah  since gewurpad
secan sundgebland  since geweorðad

wicga ond wæpna  het hine wel brucan
beah ond byrnan  het hyne brucan well

swa manlice  mære þeoden
hordweard hæleþa  heaþoræsas geald
tomiddes  mærne þeoden
hæleð hiofende  hlaford leofne
hordweard hæleþa  heaþoræsas geald

mearum ond madmum  swa hy næfre man lyhð
meaþr ond maðmum  mæst hlifade
meara ond maðma  swa sceal mæg don
on þære medubence  mapðum gesalde
yarfelaf ònd þone ænne heht
on meodubence mapme* þy weorþra*
[MS mapma; weorpre]
yrfelaf ðewat him on naca
leofes ond lapes se þe longe her
leofes ond laðes nu ys leodum wen
gomenwudu greted gid oft wrecen
gomenwudu grette hwilum gyd awræc
jong on galgan þonne he gyd wrec
wordgyd wrecan ond ymb wer sprecan
be Finnes eaferum  ða hie se fœr begeat
[MS DAMAGED AND ILLEGIBLE]
meotodscealht bemearn sy∂an morgen com
maþma gemænra sip∂an morgen bið
manegum maðmum sy∂an mergen com
noðer hy hine ne moston sy∂an mergen cwom
noðer hy hine ne moston sy∂an mergen cwom
morþorbealo maga þær heo ær mæste he
mordørbealo maga þonne min sceaceð
wi∂ eotena bearn agan moston
þæt he eotena bearn inne gemunde
efne swa swi∂e sincgestreonum
sincgestreona beo þu suna minum
faettan goldes swa he fresena cyn
faettan golde fela leanode
faettan goldes fea worda cwæ∂
elne unhlitme* aðum benemde
[MS unflitme]
eal unhlitme eard gemunde
æt þæm ade wæs epgesyne
ofe æþelinge ypgesene
swatfah syrce swyn edalylden
sweord swate fah swin ofer helme
wand to wolcnum  wælfyræ mæst
won to wolcnum  þonne wind styrep
ongunnan þa on beorge  bælfyræ mæst

laðbite lices  lig ealle forswealg
leofes mannes  lic eall forswealg

þonne him hunlafing  hildeleoman
hildeleoman  hreðsigora ne gealp

swoordbealo sliden  æt his selfes ham
snude to soðe  þæt his selfes ham*
[MS him]

feonda feorum  swilce fin slægen
freonda feorum  þa wæs frod cyning

æghwylc oðrum trywe  swylce þær Unferþ þyle
her is æghwylc  eorl oþrum getrywe

goldwine gumena  ond to geatum spræc
goldwine gumena  hwæt wit geo spræcon
goldwine gumena  gistas setan

mildum wordum  swa sceal man don
mundgripe mægenes  swa sceal man don
meara ond maðma  swa sceal mæg don

wene ic þæt he mid gode  gyldan wille
þæt we him ða guðgetawa  gyldan woldon

uncran eaferan  gif he þæt eal gemon
fremeð on folce  feor eal gemon
orleghwila ic þæt eall gemon

wordum bewægned  ond wunden gold
þa wæs wunden gold  on wæn hladen

nefa swertinges  nyhstan side
niehstan side  ic geneðde fela

breostgewædu  ond se beah somod
breostgewædu  bruc ealles well

wyrsan wigfrecan  wæl reafedon
wyrsan wigfrecan  weorde gecyðan
þenden he wið wulf  wæl reafode
bruc ðisses beages  beowulf leofa
bebeorgh þe ðone bealoniod  Beowulf leofa
licad leng swa wel  leofa Beowulf
hu lomp eow on lade  leofa Biowulf
leofa Biowulf  læst eall tela

hafast þu gefered  þæt þe feor ond neah
hafast þu gefered  þæt þam folcum sceal
eode þa to setle  þær wæs symbla cyst
ga nu to setle  symbol wynne dreoh
eorla manegum  syþdan æfen cwom
eorla manegum  syþdan æfen cwom
earfoðlice  oddæt æfen cwom
ond him Hroþgar gewat  to hofe sinum
hringa þengel  to hofe sinum

fus ond fæge  fletræste gebeag
fus ofer fægum  fela reordian

heaposteapa helm  hringed Byrne
headosteapne helm  hare byrnan
brunfagne helm  hringde byrnan

æfter guðceare  Grendles modor
Grendles modor  wæs se gryre læssa
guðgeata leod  Grendles modor
gearo gynwraece  Grendeles modor
in þam guðsele  Grendeles modor

gifre ond galgmod  gegan wolde
se de gryresiodas  gegan dorste
þonne he æt guðe  gegan þenceð
syðdan hie togædre  gegan hæfdon

edhwyrt eorlum  siþdan inne fealh
ärenes þearfa  ond þær inne fealh

cuþe folme  cearu wæs geniwod
ne frin þu æfter sælum  sorh is geniwod
þa se wyrm onwoc  wroht wæs geniwad

freonda feorum  þa wæs frod cyning
2209 fiftig wintra \( \text{wæs} \ \text{ða} \ \text{frod} \ \text{cyning} \)

1307 \text{har} \ \text{hilderinc} \ \text{on} \ \text{hreon} \ \text{mode}

2581 æfter headuswenge \( \text{on} \ \text{hreoum} \ \text{mode} \)

3136 \text{har} \ \text{hilderinc} \ \text{to} \ \text{Hronesnæsse}

1311 sigoreadig secg \( \text{samod ærdæge} \)

2352 sigoreadig secg \( \text{sele} \ \text{fælsode} \)

2942 sarigmodum \( \text{somod ærdæge} \)

1313 \text{self mid gesiðum} \ \text{þær se snotera bad}

1924 \text{selfa mid gesiðum} \ \text{sæwealle neah}

1327 \text{hafelan weredon} \ \text{bonne hniton feðan}

1448 \text{ac se hwita helm} \ \text{hafelan werede}

2544 hildehlemma \( \text{bonne hitan feðan} \)

1326 \text{eaxlgestealla} \ \text{ðonne we on orlege}

1714 \text{eaxlgesteallan} \ \text{øfþæt he ana hwearf}

1338 \text{ealdres scyldig} \ \text{ond nu øfer cwom}

2061 \text{ealdres scyldig} \ \text{him se øder þonan}

1341 þæs þe þincean mæg \( \text{begne monegum} \)

1419 to geþolianne \( \text{degne monegum} \)

1343 hréþerbealo hearde \( \text{nu seo hand} \ \text{ligeð} \)

2745 wiglaf leofa \( \text{nu se wyrm ligeð} \)

1353 næfne he wæs mara \( \text{bonne ænig man øder} \)

1560 buton hit wæs mare \( \text{donne ænig mon øder} \)

1360 under næssa genipu \( \text{níþer gewiteð} \)

2808 ofer floda genipu \( \text{feorran drifað} \)

1381 ealdgestreonum \( \text{swa ic ær dyde} \)

1458 þæt wæs an fóran \( \text{ealdgestreona} \)

1891 eftsið eorla \( \text{swa he ær dyde} \)

ure æghwyelc sceal \( \text{ende gebidan} \)

1386–7 worolde lifes \( \text{wyrce se þe mote} \)

æþeling ærgod \( \text{ende gebidan} \)

2342–3 worulde lifes \( \text{ond se wyrm somod} \)

1403 æfter waldswaþum \( \text{wide gesyne} \)

2316 wæs þæs wyrmes wig \( \text{wide gesyne} \)

2947 wælræs weora \( \text{wide gesyne} \)
wægliðendum  wide gesyne

gang ofer grundas  þær heo gegnum for

glad ofer grundas  gæst yrre cwom

on þam holmclife  hafelan metton
from þam holmclife  hafelan bæron

sellice sædracan  sund cunnian
sid ond searofah  sund cunnian

yðgewinnes  þæt him on aldre stod
yðgewinne  se wæs innan full

niða genæged  ond on næs togen
niða genægdan  nefan hererices

wundortlic wægbora  weras sceawedon
whiteseon wrætlic  weras on sawon

eorlgwædum  nalles for ealdre mearn
gefeng þa be eaxle  nalas for fæhðe mearn

þæt him hildegrap  hreþre ne mihte
ac him hildegrap  heortan wylmas

eorres inwitfeng  aldre gesceþðan
aldre sceþðan  ac seo ecg geswac

ecg wæs iren  atertanum fah
ecg wæs iren  ealdhlaforde

manna ængum  þara þe hit mid mundum bewand
monig morgenceald  mundum bewunden

under yða gewin  aldre genepan
eorlscipe efnde  ealdre geneðed

gępenc nu se mæra  maga Healfdenes
sona me se mæra  mago Healfdenes
þæt se mæra  maga Ecgðeowes

snotra fengel  nu ic eom siðes fus
snotra fengel  sume worde het

aldre linnan  þæt ðu me a wære
æðeling unwrecen  ealdres linnan
swylce þu ða madmas þe þu me sealdest
ic him þa maðmas þe he me sealde
mæg þonne on þæm golde ongitan geata dryhten
geata dryhten þeax ðe he geong sy
dryhten geata dracan sceawian
geata dryhtne guð onsæge
wið ðam gryregieste geata dryhten
dryhten geata deaðbedde fæst
geald þone guðræs geata dryhten
mæg þonne on þæm golde ongitan geata dryhten
geseon sunu Hrædles þonne he on þæt sinc starāð
gead þone guðræs geata dryhten
Hræðles eafora þa he to ham becom
heardécg habban ic me mid Hruntinge
ne meahte ic æt hilde mid Hruntinge
æfter þæm wordum Wedergeata leod
ne nom he in þæm wicum Wedergeata leod
Wedergeata leod word ut faran
ær he þone grundwong ongytan mehte
grundwong þone ofgyfan wolde
heorogifre beheold hund missera
swa ic Hringdena hund missera
locene leodosyrca lanþan fingrum
locene leodosyrca landweard onfand
hringa fengel* to hofe sinum
ofehogode āa hringa fengel
ne him for hrofsele hrian ne mehte
þæt þam hringsele hrian ne moste
deorum madme þæt his dom alæg
deore maðmas ealle hie deað fornarn
dyre maðmas dracan ec scufun
stið ond stylecg strenge getruwode
under stancleofu strenge getruwode
fepecempe þæt he on fylle wareð
2853  *feòdecempa*  frean eaxlum neah

1550  hæfde ða forsiðod  *sunu Ecgþeowes*

2367  oferswan ða sioleða bigong  *sunu Ecgðeowes*

2398  sliðra geslyhta  *sunu Ecgðiowes*

1554  geweold wigsigor  witig drihten

1841  þe þa wordcwydas  witig drihten

1558  *ealdsweord eotenisc*  ecgum þyhtig

2616  *ealdsweord eotenisc*  þæt him Onela forgeaf

2979  *ealdsweord eotenisc*  entiscne helm

1587  *aldorlesne*  swa him ær gescod

3003  *aldorlesne*  þone ðe ær geheold

1590  heorosweng heardne  ond hine þa heafde becearf

2138  holm heolfre weoll  ond ic heafde becearf

1593  þæt wæs yðgeblond  eal gemenged

1620  wæron yðgebland  eal gefælsod

1594  brim blode fah  *blondenfæaxe*

wolde *blondenfeax*  beddes neosan

1873  *blondenfæaxum*  him wæs bega wen

2962  *blondenfæxa*  on bid wrecen

1599  þæt hine seo brimwylf  *abroten* hæfde  [MS *abreoten*]

2707  ond hi hyne þa begen  *abroten hæidon*

1601  *hwate Scyldingas*  gewat him ham þonon

2052  *aefter hæleþa hryre*  hwate Scyldingas

3005  *aefter hæleða hryre*  hwate Scildingas

1616  *forbarn brodenmæl*  wæs þæt blod to þæs hat

1667  *forbarn brogdenmæl*  swa þæt blod gesprang

1637  *felamodigra*  feower scoldon

1888  cwom þa to flode  *felamodigra*

1639  to þæm goldsele  Grendles heafod

1648  *Grendles heafod*  þær guman druncon

2083  of ðam goldsele  gongan wolde

1641  *frome fyrdhwate*  feowertyne

2476  *frome fyrdhwate*  freode ne woldon
1646 hæle hildedeor Hroðgar gretan
1816 hæle hildedeor Hroðgar grette
2010 to ðam hringsele Hroðgar gretan
3111 hæle hildedior hæleda monegum

1673 ond þegna gehwylc þinra leoda
1708 eal langtwidig leodium þinum
2033 ond þegna gehwam þara leoda
2095 þær ic þeoden min þine leode

1675 þeoden Scyldinga on þa healf
2063 þonne bioð abrocene on ba healf

1679 enta ærgeweorc hit on æht gehwearf
geræt on sesse seah on enta geweorc
eald enta geweorc anne mannan

1684 on geweald gehwearf woroldcyninga
3180 cwædon þæt he wære wyruldcyninga*[MS wyruldcyning]
on geweald gehwearf woroldcyninga
1684–6 ðara þe on Scedenigge sceattas dælde
bone selestan sæcyninga
2382–3 þara þe in swiorice sinc brytnade

1692 ecean dryhtne him þæs endelean
1779 ecean dryhtne þæs ðe ic on aldre gebad
2330 ofer ealde riht ecean dryhte
2796 ecum dryhtne þe ic her on starie

1700 þæt la mæg secgan se þe sod ond riht
2864 þæt la mæg secgan se þe wyle sod specan

1702 eald .w. weard þæt ðes eorl wære
2210 eald ð. weard þæt ðes eorl wære

1709 hæleðum to helpe ne wearð Heremod swa
1830 hælepa to helpe ic on Higelac wat
1961 hæleðum to helpe Hemminges mæg

1716 þe hine mihtig god mægenes wynnum
1887 mægenes wynnum se þe oft manegum scod

1719 breosthord blodreow nallas beagas geaf
2635 in biorsele þe us ðas beagas geaf
3009 ond þone gebringan þe us beagas geaf
1724 awræc *wintrum fros*  wundor is to secganne
2114 þonne he *wintrum fros*  worn gemunde
2277 warð *wintrum fros*  ne byð him wihte ðy sel

1730 seleð him on eþle  *eorpan wynne*
2727 *eordan wynne*  ða wæs eall sceacen  [MS wyn . . .]

1733 side rice  þæt he his selfa ne mæg
2199 side rice  þam ðær selra wæs

1736 *adl* ne yldo  ne him inwitsorh
1763 þæt þec *adl oððe ecg*  eafþæs getwæfeð
1848 *adl oððe*  iren  ealdor ðinne

1781 ofer ealdgewin  *eagum starige*
1935 þæt hire an dæges  *eagum starede*

1784 *mapma gemænra*  sipðan morgen bið
1860 *mapmas gemæne*  manig ofærne

1788 *fletsittendum*  fægere gereorded
2022 þa ic freaware  *fletsittende*

1789 *niowan stefne*  nihthelm geswearc
2594 *niwan stefne*  nearo ðrowode

1792 *gamela Scylding*  geat unigmetes wel
2105 þær wæs gidd ond gleo  *gomela Scilding*
2487 guðhelm toglad  *gomela Scylfing*
2968 *gomela Scilfing*  ac forgeald hraðe

1798 *heapoliðende*  habban scoldon
2955 *headoliðendum*  hord forstandan

1810 cwæð he þone guðwine  *godne tealdon*
2641 þe he usic garwigend  *gode tealdon*
2184 swa hyne geata bearn  *godne ne tealdon*

1812 *meces ecge*  þæt wæs modig secg
2614 *meces ecgum*  ond his magum ætbær
2939 cwæð he on mergenne  *meces ecgum*

1847 hild heorugrimme  *hreðles eaferan*
2358 hreðles eafora  hiorodryncum swealt
2992 hreðles eafora  þa he to ham becom

1858 *inwitniþas*  þe hie ær drugon
inwitniða syððan ærest wearð

ealdum infrodum opres swiðor

eard edelriht oðrum swiðor

hægsteal德拉 heap hringnet bæron

hyran heðosiocum hringnet beran

ofeR Hroðgares hordgestreonum

hordgestreona hider utætbær

Hæreþes dohtor næs hio hnah swa þeah

gleond þæt healreced Hæreðes dohtor

huru þæt onhohsnode Hemminges* mæg [MS hem ninges]

hæleðum to helpe Hemminges* mæg [MS hem inges]

gyfen goldhroden geongum cempan

onginneð geomormod geongum cempan

geongan cempan þæt he guðe ræs

ligesceafta ligigende breac

ligesceafta þonne leng ne mæg

gewat him ða se hearda mid his hondscole

gewat him ða se goda mid his gædelingum

wearð on ðam wange þær he worna fela

geseah ða be wealle se ðe worna fela

swa begylpan ne þearf Grendeles maga

ond æt guðe forgrap Grendeles mægum

se ðe lægest leofað laðan cynnes

laðan cynnes no þæt læjest wæs

under heofones hwealf healsittendra

healsittendum helm ond byrnan

rices hyrde ond þæt ræd talað

rices hyrde ræd ænigne

æfter leodhryre lytle hwile

lytle hwile lifwynna breac

þonne he mid fæmnan on flett gæð

frætwum hremig on flet gæð
on him gladiað  gomelra lafe  
2036

god guðcyning  gomele lafe  
2563

under heregriman  hindeman siðe  
2049

hwate helmberend  hindeman siðe  
2517

glad ofer grundas  gaest yrre cwom  
2073

Æfter ðam wordum  wyrm yrre cwom  
2669

þær wæs Hondscio  hild*  onsaæge  
2076

Geata dryhtne  guð onsaæge  
2483

dior dædfruma  gedon wolde  
2090

drihten wedera  gedon wolde  
2186

hwilum hildedeor  hearpan wynne  
2107

hæleðum be healfe  næs hearpan wyn  
2262

hildestrengo  hreðer inne weoll  
2113

bitre gebulge  breost innan weoll  
2331

hyne hordweard  hreðer æðme weoll  
2593

eorlscipe efnede  ealdre geneðde  
2133

eorlsype efne  ic mid elne sceall  
2535

eorlscipe efnan  swa his ærfæder  
2622

eorlscipe efnde  nu is ofost betost  
3007

maerðo fremede  he me mede gehet  
2134

maerðu fremman  gif mec se mansceæða  
2514

ic ða ðæs wælmes  þe is wide cuð  
2135

wihte ne wene  ac wæs wide cuð  
2923

feorh oðferede  næs ic fæge þa gyt  
2141

feoll on foldan  næs he fæge þa git  
2975

mægnes mede  ac he me maðmas*  geaf  
2146

[WORD LOST AT EDGE OF MS]  

onmunde usic mærða  ond me þas maðmas  geaf  
2640

þæt se mondryhten  se eow ða maðmas  geaf  
2865

sunu Healfdenes  on minne sylfes  dom  
2147

sylfes dome  segn eac genom  
2776

snotra fengel  sume worde het  
2156

snottra fengel  nu ic eom siðes fus  
1475
leod Scyldunga lange hwile
leoflic lindwiga leod Scylfinga
no ðy ær suna sinum syllan wolde
nu ic suna minum syllan wolde
breostgewædu bruc ealles well
beah ond byrnan het hyne brucan well
dyrnum crefte deað renian
dyrnan crefte dracan heafde neah
hondgesteallan hygelace wæs
nealles him on heape handgesteallan* [MS heand gesteallan]
eft þæt geiode ufaran dogrum
uferan dogrum eadgilse wearð
hildehlæmmum syðdan hygelac læg
hildehlemma syðdan he hroðgares
hildehlemma þonne hnitian fedan
fiftig wintra wæs da frod cyning
fiftig wintra næs se folccyning
sylfes willum se ðe him sare gesceod
to ðyssum siðfate sylfes willum
fættan goldes fea worda cwæð
freen on fultum fea worda cwæð
feorhbealo frecne fyra gehwylcne
feorhbealu frecne frean eowerne
oððe feormie fæted wæge
fæted wæge friðowære bæd
dryncfæt deore duguð ellor sceoc
drincfæt dyre þa wæs dæg sceacen
fætum befallen feormynd swefað
reote berofene ridend swefað
fyre befangen hyne foldbuend
fyre befongen se ðe ær folce weald
warað wintrum frod ne byð him wihte ðy sel
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2687</td>
<td>wæpen wundrum heard  naes him wihte ðe sel</td>
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<td>2279</td>
<td>heold on hrusan  hordærna sum</td>
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<td>2831</td>
<td>hreas on hrusan  hordærne neah</td>
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<td>2280</td>
<td>eacencrafteig  oððæt hyne an abealch</td>
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<td>3051</td>
<td>þonne was þæt yrfe  eacencrafteig</td>
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<td>2300</td>
<td>sincefæt sohte  he þæt soma onfand</td>
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<td>2713</td>
<td>swelan ond swellan  he þæt soma onfand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2306</td>
<td>drincfæt dyre  þa was dag sceacen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2727</td>
<td>eorðan wynne  ða was eall sceacen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2316</td>
<td>wæs þæs wyrmes wig  wide gesyne</td>
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<tr>
<td>2348</td>
<td>ne him þæs wyrmes wig  for wiht dyde</td>
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<tr>
<td>2335</td>
<td>gledum forgrunden  him ðæs guðkyning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2677</td>
<td>gledum forgrunden  þa gen guðcyning</td>
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<tr>
<td>2336</td>
<td>wedera þioden  wræce leornode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2656</td>
<td>wedra ðeodnes  ic wat geare</td>
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<tr>
<td>2786</td>
<td>in ðam wongstede  wedra þeoden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3037</td>
<td>wedra þeoden  wundordeaðe swealt</td>
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<tr>
<td>2339</td>
<td>wigbord wrætlic  wisse he gearwe</td>
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<tr>
<td>2725</td>
<td>wunde wælbleate  wisse he gearwe</td>
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<td>2350</td>
<td>nearo neðende  niða gedigde</td>
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<tr>
<td>2351</td>
<td>hildhlemma  syððan he Hroðgares</td>
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<tr>
<td>2453</td>
<td>gumcystum god  guða gedigde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2366</td>
<td>fram þam hildfrecan  hames niosan</td>
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<tr>
<td>2388</td>
<td>hames niosan  syððan heardred læg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2369</td>
<td>þær him hygd gebead  hord ond rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3004</td>
<td>wið hettendum  hord ond rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2380</td>
<td>ofer sæ sohtan  suna Ohteres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2394</td>
<td>ofer sæ side  sunu Ohteres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2612</td>
<td>suna Ohteres*  þam æt sæcce wearð  [MS ohtere]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2419 goldwine geata  him wæs geomor sefa
2584 goldwine geata  guðbill geswac

2420 wæfre ond wælfus  wyrd ungemete neah
2728 dogorgerimes  deað ungemete neah

2427 orleghwila  ic þæt eall gemon
2911 orleghwile  syðdan underne

2445 to gebidanne  þæt his byre ride
2452 to gebidanne  burgum in innan

2462 wongas ond wicstede  swa wedra helm
2705 forwrat wedra helm  wyrm on middan

2472 þa wæs synn ond sacu  Sweona ond Geata
2946 wæs sio swatswaðu  Sweona* ond Geata  [MS swona]

2485 billes ecgum  on bonan stælan
2508 banhus gebræc  nu sceall billes ecg

2516 gegrette ða  gumena gehwylcne
2859 gumena gehwylcum  swa he nu gen deð

2517 hwate helmberend  hindeman siðe
2642 hwate helmberend  þeah ðe hlaford us

2524 bord ond byrnan  nelle ic beorges weard
2580 bysigum gebæded  þa wæs beorges weard

2591 alætan lædagas  næs ða long to ðon
2845 lænan lifes  næs ða lang to ðon

2602 Wiglaf wæs haten  Weoxstanes sunu
2862 Wiglaf maðelode  Weohstanes sunu

2607 wicstede weligne  Waegmundinga
2814 Waegmundinga  ealle wyrd forsweop

2624 æghwæs unrim  þa he of ealdre gewat
3135 æghwæs unrim  æþeling boren

2647 þæt ure mandryhten  nægenes behoфаð
2865 þæt se mondryhten  se eow ða maðmas geaf

2670 atol inwitgæst  oðre siðe
3101  uton nu efstan  oðre siðe*  [NOT IN MS]
2674 geongum garwigan geoce gefremman
2811 geongum garwigan goldfahne helm

2683 þæt him irenna ecge mihton
2828 ac hine irenna ecga fornamon

2738 ne sohte searoniðas ne me swor fela
3067 sohte searoniðas seolfa ne cuðe

2740 feorhbennum seoc gefean habban
2904 sexbennum seoc sweorde ne meahte

2631 Wiglaf maðelode wordrihta fela
2752 ða ic snude gefrægn sunu Wihstanes
2862 Wiglaf maðelode Weohstanes sunu
3076 Wiglaf maðelode Wihstanes sunu
3120 huru se snotra sunu Wihstanes

2759 wundur on wealle ond þæs wyrmes denn
3060 wræte* under wealle weard ær ofsloh [MS wræce]
3103 wundur under wealle ic eow wisige

2772 onsyn ænig ac hyne ecg fornam
2828 ac hine irenna ecga fornamon

2782 middelnihtum oðþæt he morðre swealt
2833 middelnihtum maðmahta wlonc

2793 gomel on giohðe* gold sceawode [MS giogoðe]
3095 gomol on gehðo ond eowic gretan het

2799 nu ic on maðma hord mine bebohte
3011 mid þam modigan ac þær is maðma hord

2805 heah hlifian on Hronesnæsse
3136 har hilderinc to Hronesnæsse

2907 ofer Biowulfe byre Wihstanes
3110 het ða gebeodan byre Wihstanes

þæt se byrnwiga bugan sceolde
2918–19 feoll on fðan nalles frætwe geaf
þæt he blode fah bugan sceolde
2974–5 feoll on foldan ðæs he fæge þa git

2929 eald ond egesfull ondslyht* ageaf [MS hond slyht]
2972 ealdum ceorle ondslyht* giofan [MS hond slyht]
2931 gomela iomeowlan  golde beroeefene
2957 eald under eorðweall  þa wæs æht boden
2970 syððan ðeodcyning  þyder oncirde
3018 ac sceal geomormod  golde bereafod
3024 wigend weccen  ac se wonna hren
3070 inn under eorðweall  ic on ofoste gefeng
3086 þe ðone peodcyning*  þyder ontyhte [NOT IN MS]
3107 ond þonne geferian  frean userne
3108 leofne mannan  þær he longe sceal
3108 leofne mannan  þær he longe sceal
3114 godum togenes  nu sceal gled fretan
3144 wigend weccan  wudurec astah
3082 lete hyne licgean  þær he longe wæs
Appendix III: A Concordance of Repeated Formulas in *Beowulf*

The following concordance is based on Appendix II above, to which readers should refer for full texts of the lines in question.

1. see lines 1354 and 2233  
129. see lines 201, 345, 353, 797, 1046, 1598, 1715, 1992, 2384, 2572, 2721, 2788, and 3141  
2. see line 2694  
130. see lines 1329 and 2342  
5. see lines 75 and 1771  
133. see lines 191 and 1747  
6. see line 1947  
133–4. see line 191–2  
8. see lines 651, 714, 1631, and 1770  
137. see lines 153, 879, and 2480  
9. see line 2734  
141. see line 833  
11. see lines 183 and 1752  
146. see lines 285, 658, and 935  
16. see lines 2159 and 2780  
148. see lines 30, 170, 1183, 1396, 1418, 2026, and 2101  
17. see lines 1934, 2040, and 2518  
150. see lines 410 and 605  
30. see lines 148, 170, 1183, 1418, 2026, and 2101  
32. see lines 1131 and 1897  
34–6. see lines 3141–2  
34. see line 3079  
35. see lines 352, 896, and 1487  
34–6. see lines 3141–2  
40. see line 2621  
35. see lines 352, 896, and 1487  
41. see line 2143  
42. see line 2026  
44. see line 1218  
45. see line 2478  
45. see line 2266  
46. see line 1187  
46. see line 347  
47. see line 1021  
47. see line 1187  
48. see line 3132  
48. see line 1021  
49. see lines 2419 and 2632  
49. see line 1187  
50. see line 162  
50. see line 1187  
51. see line 1346  
51. see line 1346  
52. see line 505  
52. see line 1346  
54. see lines 114 and 1257  
54. see line 1346  
55. see line 608  
55. see line 1346  
56. see line 1559  
56. see line 1559  
72. see lines 1271, 1751, and 2182  
72. see lines 1271, 1751, and 2182  
75. see lines 5 and 1771  
75. see lines 5 and 1771  
86. see lines 1636, 1657, 2303, 2822, and 2934  
86. see lines 1636, 1657, 2303, 2822, and 2934  
89. see lines 2458 and 3023  
89. see lines 2458 and 3023  
99. see line 2144  
99. see line 2144  
100. see line 2210  
100. see line 2210  
103. see line 1348  
103. see line 1348  
108. see lines 1692, 1779, 2330, and 2796  
108. see lines 1692, 1779, 2330, and 2796  
114. see lines 54, 1257, 1541, 1584, and 2094  
114. see lines 54, 1257, 1541, 1584, and 2094  
118. see lines 357, 431, 633, 662, and 1672  
118. see lines 357, 431, 633, 662, and 1672  
119. see line 1008  
119. see line 1008  
121. see line 1499  
121. see line 1499  
123. see line 853  
123. see line 853  
124. see lines 1882 and 2054  
124. see lines 1882 and 2054  
125. see line 1125  
125. see line 1125  
129. see lines 201, 345, 353, 797, 1046, 1598, 1715, 1992, 2384, 2572, 2721, 2788, and 3141  
130. see lines 1329 and 2342  
133. see lines 191 and 1747  
133–4. see line 191–2  
137. see lines 153, 879, and 2480  
141. see line 833  
146. see lines 285, 658, and 935  
148. see lines 30, 170, 1183, 1396, 1418, 2026, and 2101  
150. see lines 410 and 605  
153. see lines 137, 879, 2480, and 2620  
156. see line 470  
159. see lines 592, 732, and 816  
160. see lines 621 and 1674  
162. see line 50  
164. see line 1276  
165. see line 2478  
168. see line 347  
170. see lines 30, 148, 1183, 1418, 2026, and 2101  
174. see line 2644  
177. see line 2674  
178. see line 1246  
182. see line 1071  
183. see lines 17 and 1752  
187. see line 885  
189. see lines 1474, 1867, 2011, and 2143  
191–2. see lines 133–4  
194. see lines 1574 and 2977  
196–7. see lines 789–90  
197. see lines 790 and 806  
200. see line 645  
200–1. see lines 1597–8  
201. see lines 129, 345, 353, 797, 1046, 1598, 1715, 1835, 1992, 2384, 2572, 2721, 2788, and 3141  
202. see lines 416 and 1591  
203. see line 2467  
205. see lines 260, 362, 443, 1213, 1856, 1930, 2318, 2927, 3137, and 3178  
207. see lines 1156, 1378, 2373, 2870, and 3162  
214. see line 896  
217. see lines 630, 2309, and 2561
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218 see lines 727, 985, 1608, and 1909
219 see line 605
225 see lines 697, 1894, 2900, and 3156
227 see lines 625, 1397, 1626, 2617, 2623, 2730, 2851, and 2871
230 see line 704
232 see lines 1985, 2618, and 2784
238 see line 2529
242 see line 253
245 see line 1402
246 see lines 715 and 878
249 see lines 2530 and 2700
250 see line 331
252 see line 1361
253 see line 242
256 see line 3007
258 see line 340
260 see lines 205, 362, 443, 1213, 1856, 1930, 2180, 2927, and 3178
261 see lines 1580, 2180, 2418, and 3179
263 see line 373
266 see line 3099
268 see lines 344, 645, 1009, 1040, 1597, 1652, 1699, and 2147
271 see lines 359 and 1680
273 see lines 582, 875, 1346, and 2899
275 see line 2211
282 see line 2066
285 see lines 146, 658, and 935
289 see lines 1100, 1833, and 2601
291 see lines 351 and 500
292 see line 3103
296 see lines 1099 and 1182
297 see lines 1915, 1943, 1994, 2080, 2127, 2897, and 3108
302–3 see lines 1917–18
308 see lines 1496, 1911, and 2770
309 see line 1355
311 see line 1570
315 see line 341
321 see line 405
322 see line 551
325 see line 437
327 see line 1013
329 see lines 387, 729, and 1063
331 see line 250
332 see lines 363 and 481
336 see line 2014
338 see lines 442, 508, and 1206
340 see line 258
341 see line 315
342 see lines 404 and 2539
343 see line 1713
344 see lines 268, 645, 1009, 1040, 1652, 1699, and 2147
345 see lines 129, 201, 353, 797, 1046, 1598, 1715, 1992, 2384, 2572, 2721, 2788, and 3141
347 see line 168
348 see line 360
351 see lines 291 and 500
352 see lines 35 and 1487
353 see lines 129, 201, 345, 797, 1046, 1598, 1715, 1992, 2384, 2572, 2721, 2788, and 3141
357 see lines 118, 431, 633, 662, and 1672
359 see lines 271 and 1680
360 see line 348
361 see line 1819
362 see lines 205, 260, 443, 1213, 1856, 1930, 2318, 2927, 3137, and 3178
363 see lines 332 and 481
366 see line 874
371 see lines 456 and 1321
372 see line 535
373 see line 263
375 see line 2997
381 see line 1553
382 see line 458
383 see lines 1578 and 3000
384 see line 478
386 see line 2747
387 see lines 329, 729, and 1063
389 see lines 599, 696, 1323, 1712, and 2125
394 see line 799
396 see lines 2049 and 2605
400 see line 1627
404 see lines 342 and 2539
405 see line 321
410 see line 150
415 see lines 1336, 1345, 2797, and 2804
416 see lines 202, 1406, 1591, 1685, 1956, and 2382
416–17 see lines 1591–2
423 see line 1206
427 see lines 482, 609, 1494, and 2308
428 see line 663
429 see lines 899, 1972, and 2337
430 see lines 2357 and 2429
431 see lines 118, 357, 633, 662, and 1672
437 see line 325
441 see lines 452, 447, 1436, 1481, 1491, and 2536
442 see lines 338, 508, 1206, 2038, 2574, 2827, and 2984
443 see lines 205, 260, 362, 1213, 1856, 1930, 2139, 2318, 2927, 3137, and 3178
444 see lines 1915, 1943, 1994, 2080, 2127, and 2897
446 see line 1372
447 see lines 441, 452, 1436, 1481, 1491, and 2536
452 see lines 441, 447, 1436, 1481, 1491, and 2536
456 see lines 371 and 1321
457 see line 1704
458 see line 382
460 see lines 1330 and 2502
463 see line 520
464 see line 1710
465 see line 1582
467 see line 2372
468 see lines 744, 1389, and 2908
470 see lines 156 and 1380
471 see lines 2416 and 3054
472 see line 593
477 see line 2814
782 see line 1373
784 see line 732
786 see line 1682
789–90 see lines 196–7
790 see lines 197 and 806
791 see lines 1035, 1866, 1967, 2142, 2190, 2374, and 2905
795 see lines 1488 and 1688
796 see lines 2655 and 2668
796–7 see lines 2655–6
797 see lines 129, 201, 345, 353, 762, 1046, 1598, 1715, 1992, 2384, 2572, 2721, 2788, and 3141
799 see line 394
801 see line 2820
802 see lines 673, 1232, 1559, and 1697
806 see lines 197 and 790
808 see line 903
809 see lines 750, 1497, and 2226
810 see lines 701, 712, 735, 914, and 1725
813 see lines 737, 758, and 914
814 see line 2171
816 see lines 159, 592, and 732
823 see lines 767, 913, and 1417
824 see lines 626 and 2531
827 see line 1569
828 see line 1471
831 see line 1858
833 see line 141
835 see line 972
837 see lines 776, 1955, 2685, and 2837
839 see lines 1174 and 2317
840 see lines 1704 and 3032
844 see line 763
848 see line 1593
849 see line 1423
853 see line 123
858 see lines 1297, 1685, and 1956
860 see line 1773
863 see lines 11 and 2390
865 see line 916
867 see line 923
868 see lines 613, 1173, 1530, 2082, 2171, and 2689
870 see line 2114
872 see line 1971
874 see lines 366 and 987
875 see lines 273, 582, and 1346
876 see line 900
878 see lines 246 and 715
879 see lines 137, 153, and 2480
885 see line 187
887 see lines 1415, 2553, and 2744
888 see lines 1408, 2597, and 3170
892 see line 2782
893 see lines 1967, 2676, and 2917
894 see lines 2241 and 3100
895 see line 2776
896 see lines 35 and 214
899 see lines 429, 1972, and 2337
900 see line 876
902 see lines 602 and 2349
903 see line 808
907 see lines 2237 and 3035
910 see line 1837
912 see lines 767, 823, and 1417
914 see lines 701, 712, 735, 737, 758, 810, 813, and 1725
916 see line 865
919 see lines 713, 1016, and 1984
920 see line 1365
923 see line 867
933 see line 2014
934 see lines 1594 and 2974
935 see lines 146, 285, and 658
940 see lines 585 and 954
946–7 see lines 1758–9
947 see line 1759
949–50 see line 660
950 see line 1610
954 see lines 585 and 940
956 see lines 1058, 1134, 1824, and 2859
957 see lines 529, 631, 1383, 1473, 1651, 1817, 1999, and 2425
961 see lines 571, 648, 1078, 1605, 1628, 1875, 1911, and 1998
963 see line 1335
967 see line 706
969 see lines 1540 and 2933
971 see line 2164
972 see line 835
974 see lines 559 and 2008
980 see lines 590 and 1808
981 see lines 678 and 1825
982 see line 2888
985 see lines 218, 727, and 1608
986 see lines 1495 and 1576
987 see line 874
989 see line 2586
1002 see line 1565
1008 see line 119
1009 see lines 268, 344, 645, 1040, 1652, 1699, and 2147
1012 see line 2311
1013 see line 327
1014 see line 1333
1016 see lines 713, 919, and 1984
1021 see line 47
1022 see lines 1629 and 2868
1028 see lines 553 and 2192
1035 see lines 791, 1866, 1967, 2142, and 2190
1038 see line 1450
1040 see lines 268, 344, 645, 1009, 1652, 1699, and 2147
1045 see line 2812
1046 see lines 129, 201, 345, 353, 797, 1598, 1715, 1992, 2384, 2572, 2721, 2788, and 3141
1046–7 see lines 3141–2
1047 see line 1852
1048 see lines 1898 and 2166
1050 see line 2338
1052–3 see lines 1902–3
1056 see line 685
1058 see lines 956, 1134, 1824, and 2859
A Concordance of Repeated Formulas

1061 see line 2910
1063 see lines 329, 387, and 729
1065 see lines 2108, 2446, and 3172
1068 see line 2230
1071 see line 182
1077 see lines 1784, 2103, and 2124
1078 see lines 571, 648, 961, 1628, 1875, 1911, and 1998
1079 see line 2742
1088 see line 1141
1092 see line 1226
1093 see lines 2102 and 2246
1094 see lines 492 and 2635
1097 see line 1129
1099 see lines 296 and 1182
1100 see lines 289 and 1833
1110 see line 1244
1111 see line 1286
1113 see line 635
1119 see lines 1374 and 3143
1122 see line 2080
1125 see line 125
1129 see line 1097
1131 see lines 32 and 1897
1134 see lines 956, 1058, 1824, and 2859
1137 see line 607, 1922, and 2071
1139 see lines 1476 and 1602
1147 see line 2325
1152 see line 1306
1156 see lines 207, 1378, 2373, 2870, and 3162
1162 see line 612
1165 see line 1228
1166 see line 500
1170 see lines 607, 1922, and 2071
1171 see lines 1476 and 1602
1172 see lines 1534 and 2166
1173 see lines 613, 868, 1530, 2082, 2171, and 2689
1174 see lines 839 and 2317
1182 see lines 296 and 1099
1183 see lines 30, 148, 170, 1418, 2026, and 2101
1184 see line 2636
1185 see lines 1701 and 2427
1187 see line 46
1191 see line 676
1193 see line 3134
1203 see line 2511
1206 see lines 338, 423, and 508
1211 see line 2162
1212 see lines 2496 and 3027
1213 see lines 205, 260, 362, 443, 1856, 1930, 2318, 2927, 3137, and 3178
1216 see lines 1758, 1854, 1987, and 2663
1218 see line 44
1221 see line 1855
1226 see line 1092
1228 see line 1165
1232 see lines 1559 and 1782
1235 see line 2303
1236 see lines 662 and 1507
1241 see line 3025
1244 see line 1110
1245 see lines 2153 and 2615
1246 see line 178
1252 see line 646
1257 see lines 54 and 114
1258 see lines 1282, 1538, 2118, and 2139
1271 see lines 72, 1751, and 2182
1273 see line 698
1274 see lines 839 and 2317
1275 see line 721
1276 see line 164
1277 see lines 1462, 1535, and 2630
1278 see lines 512, 1429, and 2119
1281 see line 2225
1282 see lines 1258, 1538, 2118, and 2139
1286 see line 1111
1287 see line 1558
1297 see lines 858, 1685, and 1956
1303 see lines 1322 and 2287
1306 see lines 1152 and 2209
1307 see lines 2581 and 3136
1311 see lines 2352 and 2942
1313 see line 1924
1321 see lines 371 and 456
1322 see lines 1303 and 2287
1323 see lines 389, 599, 696, 1712, and 2125
1326 see line 1714
1327 see lines 1448 and 2544
1329 see lines 130 and 2342
1330 see lines 460 and 2502
1333 see line 1014
1335 see line 963
1336 see lines 415, 1345, 2797, and 2804
1338 see line 2061
1341 see line 1419
1343 see line 2745
1345 see lines 415, 1336, 2797, and 2804
1346 see lines 51, 273, 582, and 875
1348 see line 103
1353 see line 1560
1354 see lines 1 and 2233
1355 see line 309
1360 see line 2808
1361 see line 252
1365 see line 920
1372 see line 446
1373 see line 782
1374 see line 1119
1378 see lines 207, 1156, 2373, 2870, and 3162
1380 see line 470
1381 see lines 1458 and 1891
1383 see lines 529, 631, 957, 1473, 1651, 1817, 1999, and 2425
1386–7 see lines 2342–3
1389 see lines 468, 744, and 2908
1396 see line 148
1397 see lines 227, 625, and 1626
1402 see line 245
1403 see line 2316, 2947, and 3158
1404 see line 2073
1406 see lines 416, 1685, 1956, and 2382
1408 see lines 888, 2597, and 3170
1415 see lines 887, 2553, and 2744
A Concordance of Repeated Formulas

1652 see lines 268, 344, 645, 1009, 1040, 1699, and 2147
1653 see lines 599 and 618
1655 see lines 578 and 661
1657 see lines 86, 1636, 2303, 2822, and 2934
1659 see line 1490
1667 see line 1616
1670 see lines 561 and 3174
1672 see lines 118, 357, 431, 633, and 662
1673 see lines 1708, 2033, and 2095
1674 see lines 160 and 621
1675 see line 2063
1679 see lines 2717 and 2774
1680 see lines 271 and 359
1682 see line 786
1684 see line 3180
1684–6 see lines 2382–3
1685 see lines 416, 858, 1297, 1406, 1556, and 2382
1688 see lines 795 and 1488
1692 see lines 108, 1779, 2330, and 2796
1696–7 see lines 672–3
1697 see lines 673, 802, 1232, and 1559
1699 see lines 268, 344, 645, 1009, 1040, 1652, and 2147
1700 see line 2864
1701 see lines 1185 and 2427
1702 see line 2210
1704 see lines 457 and 840
1708 see lines 1673, 2033, and 2095
1709 see lines 1830 and 1961
1710 see line 464
1712 see lines 389, 599, 696, 1323, and 2125
1713 see line 343
1714 see line 1326
1715 see lines 129, 201, 345, 353, 797, 1046, 1598, 1992, 2384, 2572, 2721, 2788, and 3141
1716 see lines 701 and 1725
1719 see lines 2635 and 3009
1724 see lines 2114 and 2277
1725 see lines 701, 712, 735, 810, 914, and 1716
1730 see line 2727
1733 see line 2199
1736 see lines 1763 and 1848
1747 see line 133
1751 see lines 72, 1271, and 2182
1752 see lines 17 and 183
1758 see lines 1216, 1854, 1987, and 2663
1758–9 see lines 946–7
1759 see line 947
1763 see lines 1736 and 1848
1769 see line 1498
1770 see lines 8, 651, 714, and 1631
1771 see lines 5 and 75
1773 see line 860
1779 see lines 108, 1692, 2330, and 2796
1781 see line 1935
1782 see line 1232
1783 see line 530
1784 see lines 1077, 1860, 2103, and 2124
1788 see line 2022
1789 see line 2594
1790 see lines 651 and 3030
1791 see lines 1594, 1873, and 2962
1792 see lines 2105, 2487, and 2968
1794 see line 579
1798 see line 2955
1808 see lines 590 and 980
1810 see lines 2641 and 2184
1812 see lines 2614 and 2939
1816 see lines 1646, 2010, and 3111
1817 see lines 529, 631, 957, 1383, 1473, 1651, 1999, and 2425
1819 see line 361
1824 see lines 956, 1058, 1134, and 2859
1825 see lines 678 and 981
1826 see line 1497
1830 see lines 1709 and 1961
1831 see lines 1484, 2402, 2483, 2560, 2576, 2901, and 2991
1832 see lines 610, 1849, 2644, and 2981
1833 see lines 289 and 1100
1835 see line 201
1837 see line 910
1841 see line 1554
1847 see lines 2358 and 2992
1848 see lines 1736 and 1763
1849 see lines 610, 1832, 2644, and 2981
1852 see line 1047
1854 see lines 1216, 1758, 1987, and 2663
1855 see line 1221
1856 see lines 205, 260, 362, 443, 1213, 1930, 2318, 2927, 3137, and 3178
1858 see lines 831 and 1947
1860 see line 1784
1866 see lines 791, 1035, 1697, 2142, and 2190
1867 see lines 189, 1474, 2011, and 2143
1873 see lines 1594, 1791, and 2962
1874 see line 2198
1875 see lines 571, 648, 961, 1078, 1628, 1911, and 1998
1882 see lines 124 and 2054
1887 see line 1716
1888 see line 1637
1889 see line 2754
1890 see line 1505
1891 see line 1381
1894 see lines 225, 697, 2900, and 3156
1897 see lines 32 and 1131
1898 see lines 1048 and 2166
1899 see line 3092
1902–3 see lines 1052–3
1909 see line 218
1911 see lines 308, 571, 648, 961, 1078, 1496, 1628, 1875, 1998, and 2770
1915 see lines 297, 1943, 1994, 2080, 2127, 2897, and 3108
1917–18 see lines 302–3
1922 see lines 607, 1170, and 2071
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Index of Lines and Passages Cited and Discussed

A passage is defined here as containing three complete lines of verse, or at least six half-lines, while a citation is two-and-a-half lines, or five half-lines, or fewer. Passages and citations are arranged numerically by line, and then by length. Citations of half-lines and whole verses have in certain cases been combined for considerations of space; the intention has been throughout to provide as full an index as possible of the verses of *Beowulf* discussed or cited within this book without complicating the index unnecessarily.

### Passages cited and discussed

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