Chapter 1

Eight Notes on the *Beowulf* Text

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In 1998 Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson published their landmark edition of *Beowulf* (Mitchell & Robinson 1998). The work can truly be considered as a *summa* of scholarship on this epic text. The following eight notes discuss individual passages in which some modifications of the traditional interpretations seem possible. In the individual cases the vocabulary does not present major problems, but difficulties arise in the syntactic analysis. All quotations are taken from Mitchell and Robinson (1998). Diacritics have been omitted unless required by the linguistic argument. The notes deal with eight half-lines of the *Beowulf* text: (1) *meodosetla ofteah* (5b), (2) *feond on helle* (101b), (3) *swylcum gifeþe bið* (299b), (4) *seon sibbegedriht* (387a), (5) *wiste þæm ahlæcan* (646b), (6) *word oþer fand* (870b), (7) *þa hine se broga angeat* (1291b) and (8) *on fæder stæle* (1479b).

1   *meodosetla ofteah* (5b)

The initial three lines of *Beowulf* refer to the glory of the Danish kings in former times. Then the mythical founder of the dynasty is introduced:

> Oft Scyld Scefing   sceaþena þreatum
> monegum mægþum   meodosetla ofteah
> <div align="right">(Beo 4–5)</div>

Liuzza translates the two lines as follows: "Often Scyld Scefing seized the mead-benches from many tribes, troops of enemies" (Liuzza: 2000: 53). The at first sight almost obvious interpretation of *meodosetla ofteah* as 'he pulled away the mead-benches' is grammatically not acceptable, however:

meodosetla is certainly a genitive of the plural, but the verb *ofteon* 'pull away' governs the accusative.

The correct interpretation of *meodosetla ofteah* was suggested in an early paper by Holtzmann (1863) and repeated with further material by Sievers (1904): the form *ofteah* is not the preterite of *oftēon* 'pull away' (strong verb of class II going back to Gmc. **teuh-* and related to German *ziehen*), but must be interpreted as the preterite of *oftīon* 'refuse'. OE *of-tīon* is a strong verb of class I, points back to Gmc. **teih-* and is related to German *zeihen* (in *verzeihen* 'to pardon'). If we wanted to normalize the reading we could put in the form *oftāh*, which may have been the authorial version. But the two verbs OE *tion* (< Gmc. **teih-*) and *tēon* 'draw' (< Gmc. **teuh-*) were not consistently kept apart; on this development see Campbell (1959: 308).

Whether the two lines really mean that Scyld Scefing subjugated other tribes by taking away their mead-benches is anything but certain. Since the underlying verb is definitely *of-tīon* (< Gmc. **teih-*, class I of strong verbs) we should posit the verb's meaning as 'refuse'. The message would then be that Scyld Scefing did not allow other tribes to achieve independence; they had to remain under his rule. The half-line *sceaþena þreatum* may be used in instrumental function and could refer to Scyld Scefing's own troops. The two quoted lines may thus be translated as follows: 'Often Scyld Scefing, together with his troops of warriors, refused mead-benches to many tribes' (i.e. he did not allow them independence).

2   *feond on helle* (101b)

Hrothgar decides to build a wonderful hall named *Heorot*. But only for a certain period of time can his Danish subjects enjoy the pleasure of Hrothgar's generosity, because the monster Grendel disturbs the peaceful proceedings and wreaks murderous havoc in the hall:

> Swa ða drihtguman   dreamum lifdon
> eadiglice   oð ðæt an ongan
> fyrene fremman   feond on helle
>   (*Beo* 99–101)

These three lines have been translated as follows: "Thus these noble men lived blessedly in joy, until a certain fiend from hell began to wreak evil"

(Swanton 1978: 39). The translation is acceptable, and the vocabulary does not present notable difficulties. The half-line *feond on helle* is troublesome, however. Since *on* does not mean 'from', Swanton's translation 'a certain fiend from hell' cannot immediately be allowed to stand. Kemble had translated quite literally: "So the vassals lived in joy, happily; until that one began to practice crime, a fiend in hell" (Kemble 1837: 5). But this translation is also quite doubtful because Grendel was not in any sense 'in' hell at the time.

Many editors and commentators assume that *on helle* somehow functions as an adjective and means 'hellish', and indeed 'a hellish fiend' would be meaningful in the given context, since there is no doubt that Grendel was considered a devilish foe. No parallels for the assumed construction have been offered, however. It may therefore be doubted whether *feond on helle* can really mean 'a hellish fiend'.

Bugge (1887) had indeed earlier pointed out that *feond on helle* is problematic, and added the following observation: "Auch begann wol Grendel nicht erst jetzt *fyrene fremman* 'frevel zu üben'; das hatte er wol schon früher getan. Allein jetzt fing er an, frevel in der halle Heort zu üben, und dies war es, das dem freudigen leben in Heort ein ende machte." ["Furthermore it was not only then that Grendel started *fyrene fremman* 'to perpetrate evil deeds'; this he had done before. Only then did he start to perpetrate evil deeds in Heort, and it is this that brought an end to the joyful life in Heort."] This argumentation seems very plausible. Consequently Bugge suggested the following emendation of the text: *oð-ðæt ân ongan   fyrene fremman feónd on healle* (to mean 'until one fiend in the hall began to perpetrate evil deeds'; Bugge 1887: 80). Klaeber notes Bugge's suggestion in his apparatus, but does not admit Bugge's reading into his text. Palaeographically Bugge's suggestion can indeed hardly be defended: why should a scribe have changed the perfectly clear form <healle> to <helle>, above all if the word for 'hall' was meaningful in the given context?

Ultimately, however, Bugge's idea may be right. It would certainly be meaningful to say that Grendel, who is likely to have perpetrated various kinds of mischief before, began to wreak havoc "in the hall (Heorot)". In an Anglian version of the epic text the half-line may therefore have read (*feond on*) *halle* with retraction of *æ* before *l* + consonant. A West-Saxon scribe did not allow the sequence <-all-> to remain unchanged, but instead of the phonologically correct form *healle* he substituted *helle*.

Grendel is literally associated with "hell" a second time in the text of *Beowulf*: *ðy he þone feond overcwom, gehnægde helle gast* (*Beo* 1273b–4a). The sequence *helle gast*, frequently viewed as a compound, can certainly mean 'the creature of hell'. One could suggest, however, that the original version was <halle gast>: the form *halle* would then be a dative-instrumental in locatival function; we could translate the half-line as 'he subdued the creature [Grendel] in the hall'. But the reading *helle* in line 1274a cannot really be objected to, even if *halle* 'in the hall' would perhaps be slightly better from the semantic point of view. The half-line *feond on helle* (*Beo* 101b), on the other hand, is hardly acceptable. It is likely that the authorial version of the epic text read *on halle* 'in the hall', and the form <halle> was incorrectly transcribed into West-Saxon as <helle>.

3   *swylcum gifeþe bið* (299b)

Upon their arrival in Denmark, Hrothgar's coastguard intercepts Beowulf and his companions, but, on being informed of Beowulf's noble lineage and his intention to rid the king's hall Heorot of the monster Grendel the coastguard allows the foreigners to proceed: he shows them the way to Hrothgar's hall and promises to request that his attendants look after the vessel, so that Beowulf's party can safely return to their homeland after their mission is accomplished. The coastguard concludes his speech as follows:

>   Gewitaþ forð beran
> wæpen ond gewædu;   ic eow wisige;
> swylce ic maguþegnas   mine hate
> wið feonda gehwone   flotan eowerne,
> niwtyrwydne   nacan on sande
> arum healdan   oþ ðæt eft byreð
> ofer lagustreamas   leofne mannan
> wudu wundenhals   to Wedermearce;
> godfremmendra   swylcum gifeþe bið
> þæt þone hilderæs   hal gedigeð
>   (*Beo* 291b–300)

The vocabulary of this passage does not present notable problems, and the translation provided by Swanton would at first sight seem more or less acceptable: "Proceed, bearing weapons and armor; I will guide you.

Moreover, I will instruct my young thanes to guard your ship honorably against all enemies, the newly-tarred vessel on the sand, until the timbers with curved prow carry back the beloved man over the sea's currents to the Weders' coastline. May it be granted to one of such noble deeds that he survive the onslaught of the battle unharmed" (Swanton 1978: 49).

A major difficulty in interpreting the coastguard's speech, though, lies in the temporal subclause introduced by *oþ ðæt* 'until', because the referent of the grammatical object belonging to *byreð* 'carries' is not immediately clear: it could be assumed that *leofne mannan* (*Beo* 297b) should refer to Beowulf, but then it is doubtful who is meant by the genitive plural *godfremmendra* and the following relative construction introduced by *swylcum gifeþe bið*. Swanton's rendering seems ultimately unacceptable mainly for two reasons: since both *bið* and *gedigeð* are indicative forms there is no basis for assuming that any wish is expressed as would be indicated by the clause starting with "May it be granted. . . ."; furthermore, *godfremmendra* seems to be the genitive plural of either *godfremmend* or *godfremmende*, but in either case the word cannot mean 'noble deeds', because the form in *-end*(*e*) (belonging to the paradigm of the present participle) clearly functions as an agent noun meaning '(one) doing good', if *god-* is correctly transmitted. In any case, *godfremmendra* seems basically to mean 'warriors'. That *godfremmendra* should begin a separate main clause, as Swanton's translation indicates, seems quite unlikely. The traditional syntactic interpretation according to which the temporal subclause introduced by *oþ ðæt* ends with *gedigeð* seems indeed probable. But the construction of that temporal clause also poses problems. The following considerations may be of use in dealing with this difficulty.

If we assume that *leofne mannan* refers to Beowulf himself then it is conceivable that the genitive plural *godfremmendra* could refer to his companions. It is likely that *swylcum* introduces a relative clause: *godfremmendra swylcum gifeþe bið* probably means 'the one (= every one) of the warriors to whom it is given . . .'. We know that not all companions returned home: Hondscio was killed by Grendel. The issue will arise again in the note on *on fæder stæle* below. Liuzza's translation is correct: "Go forth, and bear weapons and armor – I shall guide your way; and I will command my young companions to guard honorably against all enemies your ship, newly-tarred, upon the sand, to watch it until the curved-necked wood bears hence across the ocean-streams a beloved man to the borders of the Weders – and such of these good men as will be granted

that they survive the storm of battle" (Liuzza 2000: 62). But the dash after *Weders* is superfluous.

4   *seon sibbegedriht* (387a)

When Wulfgar announces to Hrothgar that the Geatish hero Beowulf has come to Denmark in order to rid the hall Heorot of the monster Grendel, the ageing Danish king praises Beowulf's noble descent and former heroic achievements. Hrothgar urges Wulfgar to usher in the Geatish party:

> Beo ðu on ofeste,   hat in gan
> seon sibbegedriht   samod ætgædere,
> gesaga him eac wordum   þæt hie sint wilcuman
> Deniga leodum.
>
> (*Beo* 386–9a)

This invitation to Beowulf and his companions to enter the hall, where "they will be welcome to the Danes" does not present serious problems with regard to its vocabulary. It should be mentioned, however, that what has frequently been printed as a compound *sibbegedriht* may represent a syntagm consisting of the genitive of *sibb* 'relationship, friendship' followed by its head *gedryht* 'troop, body of retainers'. The inherited compound would be expected as *sibgedriht* (three syllables) and is attested in *Exo* 214a, *Guth* 1372a (*sibgedryht*) and *Phoen* 618a (*sibgedryht*). The sequence has been translated as 'band of kinsmen', which is acceptable, although 'kinsmen' must not be taken literally.

What is not agreed upon is who precisely is meant at this point by *sibbegedriht*. Theoretically, *sibbegedriht* could refer to the Danes, that is, to Hrothgar's retainers, or to Beowulf's companions. Mitchell and Robinson opt for the first alternative: "OE idiom and the element order combine to suggest that *sibbegedriht* is the object, not the subject of *seon*: 'bid [them, the Geats] come in to see the band of kinsmen [the Danes]'" (Mitchell & Robinson 1998: 61). The translation offered by Swanton is quite similar: "Make haste, bid them enter to see the noble company of kinsmen assembled together" (1978: 53). Basically the same rendering is found in the translation accompanying what has been called "the first real edition" of *Beowulf* (Klaeber 1950: cxxvii): "Be thou in haste, bid them enter, *and* see our friendly troop collected together" (Kemble 1837: 17).

Although this interpretation is certainly not to be rejected immediately, one wonders whether the object "them [the Geats]" could have been omitted in what is obviously assumed to be an accusative-and-infinitive construction. Apart from this minor objection, it must be asked what the objective of Hrothgar's invitation could be. There is hardly any reason why Hrothgar should invite Beowulf and his companions to "see" ('inspect'?) the Danish "band of kinsmen", since we know that the Danes were unable to cope with Grendel and had to bear up with the mischief wrought by the monster at night for twelve years: Hrothgar could not present his "band of kinsmen" with any satisfaction or pride. It would be pointless for him to invite Beowulf to come in and "have a look" at the Danes.

Since in line 729 the sequence *sibbegedriht* definitely refers to Beowulf's party, we may inquire whether *sibbegedriht* in Hrothgar's invitation may also refer to the Geats. It would definitely be meaningful for Hrothgar to say "let the [Geatish] band of kinsmen all of them together come in." Can the manuscript reading be grammatically analysed in this sense? Above all, what is then the function of *seon* in line 387a?

Since *hatan* 'bid' can be followed by an accusative-and-infinitive, it is reasonable to assume that *hat in gan* (*seon*) *sibbegedriht samod ætgædere* means 'bid the company of kinsmen all together come in'. This interpretation was offered by Grein (1974: 600), Bugge (1887: 86), and Klaeber (1950: 142). But it has by no means been accepted generally. Johannes Hoops preferred to identify the *sibbegedriht* with the Danes, but he also discussed the alternative and noted: "*seon* wäre dann eine Variation zu *in gan*, *sibbegedriht* wäre gleichfalls Subjekts-Akk. zu *hat*, und zu *seon* wäre als Objekt *me* zu ergänzen; also: 'heiß sie hereingehn, (heiß) die Sippenschar zusammen miteinander (mich) sehen'" (Hoops 1932a: 62).

It is doubtful, however, whether *me* as the object of *seon* can have been left out. Andrew found the ellipsis "harsh" no matter whether *sibbegedriht* referred to the Danes or to Beowulf's group (Andrew 1948: 71). It must also be pointed out that an invitation for the Geats to enter Heorot in order to "see" ('meet'?) Hrothgar does not seem entirely meaningful if uttered by the king: since Beowulf and his comrades have come to rid Heorot of Grendel, it would be logical for Hrothgar to ask them to appear before him, so that he could see (= find out, decide) whether they were fit for the job. Either "me" or "us" as assumed objects of *seon* would thus hardly make sense.

Grammatically, though, the manuscript text allows yet another interpretation, which seems to lead to an altogether preferable translation of the whole passage. In Old English the infinitive does not formally distinguish between active and passive functions. With regard to *Ne hyrde ic cymlicor ceol gegyrwan* (*Beo* 38), Wyatt notes expressly that for *gegyrwan* in Modern English the passive inf. would be used (Wyatt 1968: 4). The construction of *hatan* followed by an accusative with passive infinitive is found in lines 198b–9a: *het him yðlidan godne gegyrwan*, rendered by Andrew as "ordered a good ship to be prepared for him" (Andrew 1948: 134). The infinitive *seon* with passive meaning is attested in the following *Beowulf* passage: *þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon* (*Beo* 1365) is usually assumed to mean 'there (one) can see every night a fearful wonder', which is possible. But it would also be conceivable that *seon* means 'can be seen' with *niðwundor* functioning as its subject: 'there every night a fearful wonder may be/is to be seen'.

We may therefore assume that *seon* in line 387a has a passive nuance and means (literally) 'to be seen'. Hrothgar's invitation becomes then quite clear: he is telling Wulfgar to 'bid [Beowulf's] band of kinsmen all together to come in in order to be seen (= in order to appear before the king and his entourage)'. The infinitive *seon* is to be classified as "final" after a verb of motion according to Callaway's categories (Callaway 1913: 132–48). Hrothgar's invitation is meant to convey the message that Beowulf and his companions are welcome to enter the hall and appear before the Danish king: all of them, not just a delegation, were to be received honourably and with full diplomatic protocol.

5   *wiste þæm ahlæcan* (646b)

Together with his companions Beowulf is honourably received by King Hrothgar in the hall Heorot. Beowulf promises to rid Heorot of the monster Grendel, who for twelve years has wrought havoc in the hall at night. But Unferth taunts Beowulf, whereupon the Geatish hero elaborates on his former exploits and emphasizes his prowess. The Danes then celebrate Beowulf's arrival until 'presently' (*semninga*, 644b) Hrothgar (*sunu Healfdenes*, 645a, 'Healfdene's son') 'wishes to retire' (*secean wolde   æfenræste*, 645b–6a):

> wiste þæm ahlæcan
> to þæm heahsele   hilde geþinged
> siððan hie sunnan leoht   geseon meahton
> oþðe nipende   niht ofer ealle
> scaduhelma gesceapu   scriðan cwoman
> wan under wolcnum.
>
>   (*Beo* 646b–51a)

From the immediate context it is clear that the subject of the predicate *wiste* (*Beo* 646b) '(he) knew' is Hrothgar (*sunu Healfdenes* 645a). Accordingly Mitchell and Robinson translate: "he [Hrothgar] had known an attack [to be] planned by the foe [Grendel] against the high hall from the time that they . . ." (Mitchell & Robinson 1998: 69). In the continuation of the text the insertion of a negative particle *ne* between *geseon* and *meahton* has repeatedly been proposed, but this seems quite futile. The text means that the battle had been assigned "from the time that they saw the light of sun until – at nightfall – when the shadowy creatures began to arrive wan under the clouds" (Mitchell 1992). With regard to *ahlæcan* in line 646b, however, some further thoughts may be of interest, since the function of this word is not agreed upon by *Beowulf* scholars.

   In the Mitchell and Robinson translation just quoted *ahlæcan* is analysed as referring to Grendel. This was also Klaeber's view: "In other words, the king knew that fight had been in Grendel's mind all day long; Grendel had been waiting from morning till night to renew his attacks in the hall" (Klaeber 1950: 152). Nickel's translation is quite similar (Nickel 1976: 41). But in 1930 Kemp Malone pointed out that the general context of the poem did not allow this interpretation:

> Grendel haunted the hall nights, and hence the king might well infer that the monster would turn up that night as usual. But Hroðgar had every reason to think that Grendel would expect no fighting. The English poet tells us, indeed, that for twelve years the hall had stood empty at night (138ff.; cf. 411ff.). At most, Grendel might hope to catch another victim (712f.); *hild* was far from his thoughts. Beowulf it was, not Grendel, who all day long had it in mind to fight that night; immediately upon his arrival at the Danish court he told the king of his purpose in coming . . . (Malone 1930: 234ff.)

Three years later Malone discussed the quoted passage again. In the meantime Hoops had published two important monographs on *Beowulf* (Hoops 1932a, b). In these works Hoops argued in favour of *ahlæcan*

referring to Grendel. One specific point made by Hoops is that *to þæm heahsele* implied 'movement to the hall', and since Beowulf was already inside the hall this would seem to indicate that the focus was on Grendel, who had to come to the hall (Hoops 1932a: 86ff). Malone accepted this point and published the following revised translation in 1933: "The son of Healfdene wished to seek his bed; he had known all day that a monster-fight (*lit.* a fight with the monster) was set to come to the high hall" (Malone 1933: 61f.). This rendering seems possible, although it remains somewhat doubtful whether the dative *ahlæcan* can really mean 'with (i.e. against) the monster'.

But before dealing any further with the construction of *ahlæcan* it is certainly also important to investigate the meaning of this word. Although the Old English noun *aglæca* has been discussed repeatedly from a variety of viewpoints, neither its meaning nor its etymology can in any sense be said to be agreed upon. In an extensive discussion Kuhn (1979) gave a list of meanings that can be assigned to *aglæca*. Kuhn himself rendered the meaning of *aglæca* as "a fighter, valiant warrior, dangerous opponent, one who struggles fiercely" (Kuhn 1979: 218; see also Stanley 1979: 75). Kuhn's account is based on 36 instances of *aglæca*, three compounds with a first element *aglac-* and three attestations of *aglac* as a separate noun. With regard to the attestations taken into account, he expressly noted that "All instances of these words occur in poetry, none in prose" (Kuhn 1979: 213).

A decade after the appearance of Kuhn's essay, Alex Nicholls published a paper on *aglæca* in *Byrhtferth's Manual*, which represents the only prose attestation of the word; Nicholls (1991) gives further references to secondary literature that will not be repeated here. Although the sequence *Beda, se æglæca lareow* (Crawford 1929: 74) has been emended (see Campbell 1972: 2), Nicholls argues convincingly that the manuscript reading should be accepted as correct. The syntax of *Beda, se æglæca lareow* is not immediately clear, but Nicholls' suggestion that *æglæca* is an adjective in the weak declension provides a plausible solution. What is absolutely clear, however, is that *æglæca* in *Beda, se æglæca lareow* cannot in any sense carry the meaning 'monstrous': only 'Bede, the formidable/awe-inspiring teacher' is meaningful in the given context. Nicholls' article will ultimately be of major importance in accounting for the origin and historical development of OE *aglæca*.

For the purposes of this note on *ahlæcan* in *Beowulf* (646b), it must be kept in mind that Old English *aglæca* had the connotation 'awe-inspiring'. For the *Beowulf* passage quoted above Kuhn offered the following skeleton

for the translation: "he knew battle to be appointed at the high hall for the . . ." and rightly continued: "the referent can be either Beowulf or Grendel". This is true, and in this sense Kuhn's observation definitely represents an advance in *Beowulf* interpretation. But we may go even further. Grammatically, *þæm ahlæcan* can indeed be analyzed as a dative of the singular: this seems to be the usual assumption of *Beowulf* scholars, and Kuhn's interpretation is also based on this grammatical analysis. However, this is not the only possibility: there is no objection whatsoever to interpreting *þæm ahlæcan* morphologically as a dative of the plural. The weakening of *-um > -an* in *ahlæcan* (<*ahlæcum*) can be exemplified from our extant *Beowulf* text, as was shown by Klaeber (1950: lxxxi); on the phonology of this development, see, above all, Campbell (1959: 157). The development of *-um > -an* is a well-known feature of late Old English.

If we admit that *ahlæcan* can be analysed as a dative of the plural (dual), then this indirect object would mean that 'a battle was appointed for the (two) awe-inspiring ones' ['the terrible ones']. Although in the majority of its occurrences *aglæca* is used in the singular, in *Beowulf* (2592) *aglæcean* is again a non-singular form referring to Beowulf and the dragon. The preposition *to* does not cause trouble any longer: the battle was appointed *to* the hall, because Grendel still had to come to the hall, but Beowulf was already inside it.

6 *word oþer fand* (870b)

Beowulf is victorious in his fight against Grendel in the hall Heorot, and the monster, fatally wounded, just barely manages to flee. The following morning everybody rejoices that the twelve-year ordeal of nightly havoc wrought by Grendel has been brought to an end. King Hrothgar's men make their horses gallop. Then follows a passage about poetic recital:

> Hwilum cyninges þegn
> guma gilphlæden   gidda gemyndig
> se ðe ealfela   ealdgesegena
> worn gemunde,   word oþer fand
> soðe gebunden;   secg eft ongan
> sið Beowulfes   snyttrum styrian
> ond on sped wrecan   spel gerade,
> wordum wrixlan
>
> (*Beo* 867b–74a)

For the half-line *word oper fand* (870b) two completely different syntactic analyses may theoretically be proposed. The predicate in this half-line is certainly *fand*, 'found'. The subject of *fand* can be seen in *word* 'word'; in this case *oper* 'second' could function as its object. Grein translated: "ein Wort fand das andere, Wort reihte sich an Wort" (Grein 1974: 514). This interpretation is possible, although one would wish to be given parallels for this usage of *findan*. Whether *word oper fand* could have meant 'one word found another' in the sense of 'a poem was uttered' seems doubtful, however. Nowadays the more widespread interpretation of *word oper fand* is completely different: the subject of *fand* is assumed to be *cyninges þegn* (*Beo* 867b), the object of *fand* would then seem to be *word oper*. Syntactically this analysis is unobjectionable: 'The king's retainer found (devised) other words . . .'.

The problems of the whole passage were discussed by Stanley in his chapter "Beowulf", first published more than 35 years ago (Stanley 1966). Stanley gave the following translation of lines 867b–71a: "At times the king's retainer, a man filled with high rhetoric, with the memory of songs, who remembered a multitudinous wealth of ancient traditions, came upon other words (?) bound in truth (?)" (Stanley 1966: 118 fn.1). Structurally this translation is convincing. The second of the two question marks is perhaps not necessary: it would seem reasonable to say that the poet uttered words 'bound in truth', which is likely to mean that the contents of his poems were considered to be based on real happenings presented in a reliable way.

But Stanley's first question mark is fully justified: What, after all, should "other words" refer to? Although *word oper fand* has repeatedly been construed as a reference to poetic variation it is completely uncertain whether innovation was a poetic ideal in Old English times: "there is nothing that might lead one to the view that old traditions in new words represents an ideal among the Anglo-Saxons" (Stanley 1966: 125). It would make sense, however, to say that the minstrel 'came upon words bound in truth', because this would be likely to mean that he uttered a poem. Thus the problem lies in *oper*, and it seems that a new possibility of interpreting this word and consequently the whole passage can be suggested.

Beowulf offers a further example of *oðer* not functioning as the (adjectival) ordinal for 'second'. It seems best to render *ealodrincende oðer sædon* (*Beo* 1945) as 'men drinking ale said furthermore (moreover)'. We may therefore assume that *oper* can have an adverbial function and may be translated

as 'furthermore, moreover'. In the quoted passage this yields good sense: we are told that *hwilum* ('at certain times') the king's men made their horses gallop, and *hwilum* ('at other times') the minstrel 'furthermore [~moreover] came upon words bound in truth'. The position of the stressed adverbial *oþer* in *word oþer fand* is identical with that of *stunde* in *word stunde ahof* (*El* 723b). Metrically *word oþer fand* is a D-verse comparable to *secg eft ongan* (*Beo* 871b) and *word stunde ahof* (*El* 723b). Further parallels include: *word æfter cwæð* (*Beo* 315b), *word æfter spræc* (*Beo* 341b) and *word inne abead* (*Beo* 390b). In all these instances *word* may be accusative plural of the neuter *a*-stem.

It is likely that a strong punctuation mark is required after *gebunden*, because *secg eft ongan* begins a new syntactic unit. It is noteworthy, however, that *ongan* does not necessarily mean 'began, started' here. Stanley translated the clause as follows: "The man did then tell with art the exploit of Beowulf, set forth with happy skill a well-told tale, weaving words" (Stanley 1966: 118, fn. 1). That *onginnan* need not exclusively mean 'start, begin' is perhaps most clearly seen in Beowulf's own words when he says *hæbbe ic mærða fela ongunnen on geogoþe* (*Beo* 408b–9a) 'I have undertaken [performed] many famous actions in my youth'. It is conceivable that the *scop* 'undertook to sing in honour of Beowulf's feat', but whether he explicitly dealt with Beowulf's exploits is not really stated in the text. Stanley's comment on this aspect of the text is worth quoting:

> The poet presents the *scop* to us as singing the hero's praise in the traditional manner in the traditional poetic medium. *Secg eft ongan / sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian* (871–72), we are told; surely, we may expect something about Beowulf himself. Instead we get the ideal which is embodied in Beowulf expressed in terms of Sigemund and Heremod. The relevance of Sigemund, the dragon-slayer, is not made explicit, it is too obvious to need explanation; but how love fell to Beowulf whereas iniquity took possession of Heremod is clearly stated. (Stanley 1966: 132)

Ultimately the quoted *Beowulf* passage tells us nothing about whether poetic originality was valued in Anglo-Saxon times. Since *oþer* in *word oþer fand* (870b) can hardly mean 'new' but probably functions as an adverb meaning 'furthermore, moreover', it follows that *wordum wrixlan* 'exchange words' in line 874 is also unlikely to emphasize any innovatory aspect of Old English poetic diction.

7   *þa hine se broga angeat* (1291b)

Grendel's mother comes to Heorot in order to avenge her son's death. The
events which lead to Æschere being killed by the ogress are described
in eight lines:

> Ða wæs on healle   heardecg togen
> sweord ofer setlum,   sidrand manig
> hafen handa fæst;   helm ne gemunde
> byrnan side   þa hine se broga angeat.
> Heo wæs on ofste,   wolde ut þanon,
> feore beorgan,   þa heo onfunden wæs;
> hraðe heo æþelinga   anne hæfde
> fæste befangen,   þa heo to fenne gang.
>   (*Beo* 1288–95)

This passage has recently been discussed by Elder (2002), and some of
the points made in that paper seem plausible. That *broga* 'terror' in line
1291b could refer to Grendel's mother is conceivable, and the parallel for
broga rendering Latin *monstrum* is convincing. Elder translated lines 1290b–
91b "no one thought of helmet or roomy mail-coat when that monstrous
thing perceived him" (Elder 2002: 316). That *broga* in line 1291b is per-
sonified and refers to Grendel's mother had already been suggested by
Isaacs, but his translation is not convincing at all: "The helmet was not
mindful of broad byrnie, when Grendel's dam (or terror, personified)
seized him" (Isaacs 1963: 124).

But some lingering doubt remains whether this can be correct. In the
immediately preceding lines we are told that the warriors drew their
swords. It is therefore very surprising that it allegedly occurred to no-
body to use helmet and mail-coat. The main problem certainly lies in the
translation of *angeat*. That a warrior should have been frightened into
inaction when Grendel's mother 'perceived' him is intrinsically unlikely.
What semantic nuance 'perceived' could precisely convey here is unclear
anyway: the meaning 'understand' would certainly not be suitable, but
'see, recognize' could hardly apply either, because it was of course dark.
We clearly have to investigate the meaning of the verb *ongietan*.

With regard to the semantic range of *ongietan*, Elder comments as
follows: ". . . 'perceive' is almost always a possible translation of this
verb, whether or not alternatives like 'understand,' 'be sensible of,' or

'see' are preferred in a particular context" (Elder 2002: 316). This statement is perhaps acceptable, although there is no doubt that in Old English poetry and prose *ongietan* is very widely used in the sense of Latin *intelligere* ('understand'). The meaning 'understand' represents a semantic development of 'seize', and a comparable development is encountered in *grasp*, *comprehend*, *assume*, and other verbs in this semantic field (Buck 1949: 1207, 1020). *Beowulf* scholars widely assume that *angeat* in line 1291b should have the original meaning 'seized', but Elder maintains that a basic sense like 'seize' is nowhere else attested for Old English *ongietan*. It would then be very unlikely for *angeat* to mean 'seized' in the quoted *Beowulf* passage.

Although *ongietan* often occurs in the secondary senses of 'understand' or 'perceive', in at least one passage this kind of meaning will hardly do. In the Old English translation of Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis* the following clause refers to St Peter: *Ðæt rice & ðone anwald he na ne angeat wið Cornelius ða ða he hine sua suiðlice weorðian wolde*. Sweet translated: "He did not acknowledge his power and authority in the case of Cornelius, when he wished to honour him so excessively" (Sweet 1871: 114ff). The translation is acceptable: Gregory showed that Cornelius had behaved humbly towards Peter, and therefore Peter did not assume authority, whereas he definitely reprimanded sinners like Ananias and Sapphira. Neither 'understood' nor 'perceived' would be suitable as translations of *angeat*, whereas 'assumed' or 'took' seem quite possible. Perhaps the quoted clause may be rendered as 'He (Peter) did not assume power and authority against Cornelius since he wanted to honour him so greatly.' The corresponding passage in Gregory's original reads as follows: *quod honore sibi uehementer impenso coram bene agentibus fratribus non agnouit* (Judic 1992: 210); the Old English translation is not literal, and on the reception of Gregory's work in early Ireland and England Judic's informative chapter "Diffusion et Influence" (Judic 1992: 88–102) should be consulted.

A translation like 'took' or 'seized' for *angeat* in *Beowulf* line 1291b may therefore be taken into consideration after all. In at least one further *Beowulf* passage the preterite *ongeat* may mean 'attacked', although admittedly the usual translation as 'perceived' cannot be ruled out. In order to avenge Æschere Beowulf had swum down to the bottom of the mere, where the ogress was waiting for him. She seized him and carried him away. Beowulf recognized (*ongeat*, 1512b) that he was in a dry underwater cave. He saw light (1516b). *Ongeat þa se goda   grundwyrgenne, / merewif mihtig* (1518–19a) may mean 'the good one [Beowulf] then

recognized (perceived, saw) the monster of the deep, the powerful water-woman', but in the given context 'attacked, seized' would certainly also make sense. Penttilä's remarks are fully relevant here: "With OE *ongietan* – perceptional in character – the visual impression is often preceded by an effort to see something. As pointed out by Rittershaus, the verb is often found in contexts in which it is doubtful whether the writer refers to grasping in the physical sense or grasping by means of the eyes" (Penttilä 1956: 173).

The clause *helm ne gemunde / byrnan side   þa hine se broga angeat* still requires a comment from the syntactic point of view. We may analyse *þa hine se broga angeat* as a subclause, but the main clause seems to lack a subject: "An indefinite subject, 'any one,' 'the one in question' is understood" (Klaeber 1950: 181). Klaeber's wording is ambiguous because 'anyone' and 'the one in question' are by no means synonymous. Usually the first suggestion, namely the indefinite 'anyone', is adopted by editors and commentators. But the second suggestion, namely a definite 'the one in question' seems in fact superior here: 'the one in question', namely Æschere, did not think of putting on helmet and mail-coat because there was absolutely no time for him to do so when the ogress seized him. The unexpressed subject of the main clause is identical with *hine*, the object of the subordinate clause. Kemble's translation is acceptable in this respect: "*he* [i.e. the warrior] remembered not his helmet, *nor* his wide mail-shirt, when the terror fell upon him" (Kemble 1837: 53).

If we follow in the main Elder's rendering, but work in the above considerations, then the passage may be translated: 'Then in the hall the hard-edged sword was drawn above the benches, many a broad shield was raised fast in hand; the one in question [Æschere] did not think of helmet and wide mail-coat when the monster seized him. When she was discovered, she was in haste; she wanted to get out of there to save her life. Swiftly she had taken one of the noblemen firmly in her grasp; then she went to the fen'.

8   *on fæder stæle* (1479b)

Before setting out for his fight against Grendel's mother Beowulf addresses King Hrothgar and makes final arrangements in case he should succumb in the enterprise:

> Geþenc nu, se mæra   maga Healfdenes,
> snottra fengel,   nu ic eom siðes fus,
> goldwine gumena,   hwæt wit geo spræcon,
> gif ic æt þearfe   þinre scolde
> aldre linnan,   þæt ðu me a wære
> forðgewitenum   on fæder stæle.
>
> (*Beo* 1474–9)

The vocabulary of this passage does not present any particular problems. Kemble translates the last three lines of the quoted text as "if I at thy need should cease to live, that thou wouldst ever be in the place of a father to me, *when I had* departed" (Kemble 1837: 61). Subsequent translations are similar, as may be seen from Liuzza's recent rendering: "if ever in your service I should lose my life, that you would always be in a father's place to me when I have passed away" (Liuzza 2000: 98).

One difficulty with these lines evidently lies in the conclusion of the *þæt*-clause, because it is by no means obvious in what ways Hrothgar could 'be in the place of a father to me', that is to the then-dead hero Beowulf. Swanton wants *fæder* to refer to Beowulf's father: "that if I should relinquish life in your cause, you should always take the role of my father when I passed away" (Swanton 1978: 105). It is completely unclear, however, how Hrothgar could possibly assume the role of Beowulf's father in the circumstances envisaged by the Geat: Beowulf's father Ecgþeow is mentioned by name in the epic text but is dead by the time of the fight against Grendel and Grendel's mother, and plays no role of any significance in the action. The prepositional phrase *on fæder stæle* occurs once in Old English prose: *Cristenum cyninge gebyrað swiðe rihte, þæt he sy on fæder stæle cristenra þeode* (Jost 1959: 40), and here its function is clear: 'for a Christian king it is right that he should be in the function of a father [protector] to Christian people.' The meaning 'in the function of a father [protector]' is definitely suitable also in the quoted *Beowulf* passage, and the immediately following lines make clear what Beowulf's intentions are:

> Wes þu mundbora   minum magoþegnum,
> hondgesellum,   gif mec hild nime;
> swylce þu ða madmas,   þe þu me sealdest,
> Hroðgar leofa,   Higelace onsend.
>
> (*Beo* 1480–3)

Some grammatical and contextual details must now be dealt with. The sequence *me . . . forðgewitenum* in the *þæt*-clause (*Beo* 1478b–9a) is possibly to be interpreted as an absolute construction meaning 'if I am dead' (literally '[with] me departed'); an adverbial rendering would be 'after my death' (on absolute constructions in Old English see in particular Mitchell 1985: 914–40). It is likely that *me* is not a dative object belonging somehow to *wære*. The *gif*-clause may then be translated as follows: 'If I should lose my life in your need then you should after my death forever assume the function of a father [protector]'. The following four lines indicate wherein this function lies: 'Be a protector for my followers, my companions if the battle should carry me away; and, dear Hrothgar, also send the treasures that you have given me to Higelac'. The word *fæder* is used in a metaphorical sense. Should Beowulf die, Hrothgar is requested to assume legal functions that are Beowulf's as long as the Geatish hero is alive: Hrothgar is asked to adopt Beowulf's companions into his household and to pass on to Higelac the gifts that were bestowed on Beowulf in recognition of his victorious fight against Grendel.

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