Chapter 4

THE BATTLE OF MALDON AND THE VENGEANCE OF OFFA

Mark Griffith[*]

Three Problems

In the later stages of the poetic fragment now known as *The Battle of Maldon* a comparatively extended narration of battle action comes between the short penultimate speech of Dunnere (lines 258–59) and the final gnomic exhortation of Byrhtwold (lines 312–19). Within the space of some fifty lines, the courageous actions of various followers of Byrhtnoð—Æscferð the Northumbrian hostage, Edward the Tall, Æþeric, Wistan the son of Þurstan, and the brothers Oswold and Eadwold—are briefly adumbrated together with some general battle action, but the exploit and the death of one man in particular is recorded and then celebrated at comparative length with a digressive account of a previous incident:

> Þa æt guðe sloh
> Offa þone sælidan, þæt he on eorðan feoll,
> and ðær Gaddes mæg grund gesohte.
> Raðe wearð æt hilde Offa forheawen;
> he hæfde ðeah geforþod þæt he his frean gehet,
> swa he beotode ær wið his beahgifan,
> þæt hi sceoldon begen on burh ridan
> hale to hame, oððe on here cringan
> on wælstowe, wundum sweltan
> He læg ðegenlice ðeodne gehende.[1] (lines 285b–94)

[Then in the fray Offa struck the sea-wanderer so that he fell dead to the earth; and there Gad's kinsman, Offa, found his way to the ground: he was rapidly hacked down in the battle. Nonetheless he had accomplished what he had promised his lord, according as he had previously pledged to his ring-giving master that they should both ride home sound

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* Mark Griffith is the Richard Ellmann Tutorial Fellow at New College, Oxford.

1 Quotations from the poem (but with some changes to the punctuation) are taken from *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. D. G. Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), except where otherwise noted. *Beowulf* quotations are from Klaeber 4, other Old English verse is from *ASPR*.

to the manor or else both perish in war, to die from wounds in the place of carnage. He lay like a thane close to his lord.][2]

Unlike these others, Offa has been mentioned before.[3] Indeed, if the number of textual references to a figure in the fragment is to be taken as an index of his social significance, then Offa is second only to Byrhtnoð in importance. He is a kinsman (line 5) of the unnamed *cniht* at the start who responds positively to the *eorl*'s orders to dismount and lets his valued hawk fly off to the wood. Their consanguinity perhaps disposes the poet to expect the best of this young man, or, at least, he tells us that the *cniht* will not weaken in the fray (lines 9–10). After the flight of the cowards, we are informed that Offa had seen through the empty vaunts of many of those boasting in the council (that Byrhtnoð has summoned before the battle) and had revealed as much to his lord, presumably in confidence (lines 198–201). And, in lines 231–43, Offa replies to the opening speech of the noble Ælfwine, affirming the appropriateness of his encouragement of the remaining men, before going on to curse the man first in flight whose actions have broken the Anglo-Saxons' shield-wall—Godric, the craven son of Odda. These previous allusions to Offa characterize him for us to some extent, and also in some measure justify the details of his death in the quoted passage: he was close to Byrhtnoð in life and is close, or closer, to him in death. These lines are, however, replete with problems.

Three problems, in particular, are manifest and will be shown to be explicable in but one way. Two have figured quite prominently in criticism of the poem. Concisely, they may be sketched as follows:

(1) A problem of syntax: "It has not, I think, been observed by previous editors that something is missing before this line. The antecedent implied by *þone* in 286 does not appear."[4]
(2) A problem of metrics: "[286a *Offa þone sælidan*], however, is quite inexcusable, since the verse has a half stress after the second stress, a structure which absolutely demands double alliteration."[5]
(3) A problem of aesthetics: the extremely brief account in lines 285b–86 of Offa's killing of a single anonymous Viking in the horde hardly justifies the special approbation given to him in the following lines (lines 289–94). What is it about this deed that makes it appropriate vengeance for his lord?

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2 The translation is from S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: An Anthology of Old English Poems in Prose Translation with Introduction and Headnotes* (London: Dent, 1982), 527. All subsequent translations of quotations from the poem are taken from this work unless otherwise indicated.

3 On the assumption that Edward the Tall is not Edward the Chamberlain of lines 117–21.

4 *Seven Old English Poems, Edited with Commentary and Glossary*, ed. John C. Pope (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 78, note to line 284.

5 A. J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 102, §117. For a full index of technical terms used in this chapter and volume, readers should consult the Glossary of Metrical Terms in the Appendices.

Three possible explanations for these difficulties are perhaps implied, and will be touched upon at points in the following arguments:

 (a) the poem has been inaccurately transmitted to us by its scribe(s),
 (b) the poet did not properly understand his poetic inheritance,
 (c) the poem is not of high quality.

None will be accepted.

Each of the three problems merits more detailed consideration.

(1) *The syntactic problem*. Although Pope was the first editor explicitly to claim that some text before lines 285b–86 was missing, he was not the first to detect that something was unusual about the syntax here, the narrative seemingly lacking complete coherence. Ashdown renders the line "Then Offa smote *a* seaman in the fight, so that he fell to the ground ...",[6] but the demonstrative *þone* cannot, so far as we know, function as an indefinite in Old English.[7] This translation, however, undoubtedly lends the line a more obvious sense. A quite different approach is taken by Wyatt, in his anthology of Old English texts, who comments in his note to line 286 "þone sǣlidan": "it is tantalising that we know nothing about this famous pirate," assuming, it seems, not just definiteness, but deictic force to the demonstrative, and that what is missing is the primary audience's knowledge of the event and its main participants.[8] This is an intriguing line of thought to which I shall return, but, for now, Pope's view is my concern. He continues his argument for a textual lacuna as follows: "The antecedent implied by *þone* in 286 does not appear and if we look more narrowly at the passage with this hint to guide us we see that the account of Offa's death is incomplete. There should have been mention of a viking's assault upon Offa, for it is the *lærig* of Offa's shield that bursts and his corselet that sings a terrible song. He has been fatally wounded, and though he manages to kill his assailant,

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6 *English and Norse Documents Relating to the Reign of Ethelred the Unready*, ed. Margaret Ashdown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930; reissued New York: Russell & Russell, 1972), 35 (my italics). Other translators too have decided that a shift to the indefinite is merited here. Gavin Bone, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: An Essay with Specimen Translation in Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1943), 34, offers "Offa strikes a seaman till he sinks"; Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Battle of Maldon and Other Old English Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 37, gives "Then in the turmoil Offa struck a seafarer"; Constance B. Hieatt, *Beowulf and Other Old English Poems* (Toronto: Odyssey Press, 1967), 115, renders it "In the fighting there, Offa cut down a viking attacker"; Burton Raffel and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, *Poems and Prose from the Old English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 51, translates "There Offa slew a Dane, who dropped to the earth."

7 On *an* as the indefinite article in Old English, see Matti Rissanen, *The Uses of "One" in Old and Early Middle English*, Mémoires de la Société Néophilologique de Helsinki 31 (Helsinki: Société néophilologique, 1967), 261–303; Rissanen notes its rareness in the poetry, 295–97. In Modern English demonstratives can, at least in colloquial English, sometimes function in an indefinite fashion (e.g. "I went to this pub one time ..."); whether this was possible in OE is unknown.

8 *An Anglo-Saxon Reader, Edited with Notes and Glossary*, ed. Alfred J. Wyatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 282.

he falls in the very act of doing so and is cut to pieces at once by other vikings."[9] Fulk in his revised edition of Pope's anthology agrees sufficiently strongly with him to represent lines 280–85a with an asterisked omission between lines 283 and 284:

> Swā dyde Æðelric,   æðele gefēra,
> fūs and forð-georn   feaht eornoste,
> Siġebyrhtes brōðor   and swīðe maniġ ōðer
> clufon cellod bord,   cēne hīe weredon.
> *   *   *   *
> Bærst bordes læriġ,   and sēo byrne sang
> gryre-lēoða sum.[10]

[So too did Ætheric, an aristocratic companion, brother of Sibyrht, willing and eager to advance he fought zealously and very many another—they split the curved shield; the fierce men defended themselves. Shield rim smashed and mail-coat sang a certain terrible song.]

In support of Pope, Shippey argued that "the sudden change from plurality in lines 282–83 (a 'crowd scene') to a sequence of singular nouns and unintroduced definite articles immediately following … marks an omission of some length."[11] Pope later added two points to his argument.[12] First, that the demonstrative *seo* in line 284b should not be interpreted, as it usually is, as a pronoun with generalized reference (as if it were a plural),[13] because elsewhere in the poem demonstratives used with weapons are particular, and may be translated as possessives. So, for example, in line 136a "he sceaf þa mid ðam scylde," the shield alluded to clearly belongs to the hero and the verse might satisfactorily be translated "he shoved then with his shield." Or, again, in line 144a, when Byrhtnoð attacks a second Viking "þæt seo byrne tobærst" (with the result that his mail-coat burst), a possessive again suffices to indicate the sense.[14] And, second, Pope argues that the song of terror, *gryre-leoð*, suggests, in its emotionality, that it is one of

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9 Pope, *Seven Old English Poems*, 78. The demonstrative *þone* does not, in fact, *necessarily* imply a clarifying *antecedent*: note, for example, line 77a *ðone forman man*, where definiteness is offered by the *following* clause, but no such clarification follows here.

10 *Eight Old English Poems, Edited with Commentary and Glossary by John C. Pope*, ed. R. D. Fulk (New York: Norton, 2001), 24.

11 See his "Boar and Badger: An Old English Heroic Antithesis," in *Sources and Relations: Studies in Honour of J. E. Cross*, ed. Marie Collins, Jocelyn Price, and Andrew Hamer, *LSE* 16 (1985): 220–39 at 232.

12 See John C. Pope, "Offa in *The Battle of Maldon*," in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger*, ed. Helen Damico and John Leyerle, Studies in Medieval Culture 32 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 1993), 1–27.

13 See Bruce Mitchell, *Old English Syntax* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), vol. 1, §338 and Gordon's translation, "the border of the shield broke and the corslet sang a terrible song" (R. K. Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Dent, 1934), 366).

14 The issue is discussed by Bruce Mitchell (1985), §§303–10. The grammatical form of the demonstrative, however, takes the gender of the following noun, in this instance, feminine.

the Anglo-Saxons who is struck and not a Viking: "the narrator is not given to worrying about the severity of blows inflicted on the enemy."[15]

None of this is persuasive. Leaving on one side, for the moment, the issue of the apparently absent antecedent, the other points, in reality, add nothing to the hypothesis. "There should have been mention of a viking's assault upon Offa"—but why need there have been any such thing when the text as it stands tells us that Offa attacks the seafarer and not the other way around? In Pope's view, the answer to this is that "it is the *lærig* of Offa's shield that bursts and his corselet that sings a terrible song"; but this is an argument resting wholly upon the assumption that there is missing text, for nothing in the surviving text supports this specifically. Shippey's view that the shift from plurals to singulars demonstrates a textual omission "of some length" does nothing of the sort, for such shifts occur elsewhere where no text is felt to be missing:

> Hi willað eow to gafole   garas syllan
> ættrynne ord   and ealde swurd,
> þa heregeatu   þe eow æt hilde ne deah   (lines 46–48)

[They will give you spears as tribute, the poison-tipped javelin and ancient swords, those warlike accoutrements which will profit you nothing in battle]

> Hi leton þa of folman   feolhearde speru,
> gegrundene   garas fleogan;
> bogan wæron bysige,   bord ord onfeng.   (lines 108–10)

[Then from their fists they let fly spears as hard as a file, cruelly sharpened javelins. Bows were busy, shield caught point.]

Byrhtnoð does not mean that the Anglo-Saxons will oppose the Vikings with only one deadly spear; nor does the poet mean that, despite bows being busy, only one shield was hit. The singulars have general force, and this shifting from plural to singular is a particular stylistic characteristic of the way that the poet speaks of weapons—to such an extent that sometimes the grammar is not clear on the point. "Swurd" (sword) in line 47b might be singular or plural,[16] and, indeed, in line 283a "cellod bord" (curved shield) is similarly ambiguous in number.[17] Nor is Shippey's "crowd scene" clearly introduced by a plural subject, "swiðe mænig oþer" being singular. Only if the clause begins with the

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15 Pope, "Offa in *The Battle of Maldon*," 7.

16 If singular, then the adjective is weak, poetic, and a rare form in late verse (i.e. without a preceding demonstrative or possessive); if plural, then the adjective shows extension of the *-e* inflection to the strong neuter (see A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), §641).

17 Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 527, for example, gives "they split the curved shield"; Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 366, instead offers "split the hollow shields." In any case, grammatical plurals, in OE poetry, often have singular force: see Alarik Rynell, "Plural for Singular Forms in *Beowulf*", in *Language and Style in English Literature: Essays in Honour of Michio Masui*, ed. Michio Kawai (Tokyo: Eihosha, 1991), 123–40, on weapons at 136–37.

brother of Sibyrht is the subject grammatically plural, but in that case the scene ceases to depict an anonymous crowd.

Pope's arguments that *seo* is particular in force and equivalent to a possessive, and that the emotionality of *gryreleoð* suggests the terrible fate of an Anglo-Saxon, undoubtedly have appeal, but, even if correct, the text still makes better sense as it is, without any missing lines: the brother of Sibyrht (whether or not he is Æþeric) is the antecedent of the demonstrative (cf. 142a "færsceaðan" … 144a "seo byrne") and the owner of the mail-coat which (by metonymy, or projection) screams in terror. Offa's assault upon the Viking is part of a narrative chain in which the Anglo-Saxons are presented as the protagonists actively attacking their enemies, and their deaths are only narrated, or implied, *subsequently* to these attacks. Allusion to an initial attack by a seafarer upon Offa before his assault would disrupt this narrative pattern which foregrounds the heroism of the Englishmen, and could only serve to diminish the contribution of Offa. The Anglo-Saxons are attackers first and then, briefly, victims second. So, the hostage helps and fires many darts at the Vikings (265–71), for as long as he is able (272); Edward the Tall disdains flight, breaks the shield-wall and fights the Vikings (273–79a) before he is slain (279b); Æþeric fights earnestly (280–81), the brother of Sibyrht along with others cleaves shields (282–83) and is slain (284–85a), Offa slays the seafarer (285b–86) and then is cut to pieces (287–88). That this is, indeed, the correct way of reading the order of events in the passage, and of understanding its coherence, is confirmed by the syntax of 285b–86a "þa æt guðe sloh Offa": the word order adverbial *þa* + verb + subject in the poem marks new action, and not the continuation of existing action, which is, instead, indicated by the word order verb + adverbial *þa* + subject (although this order also is used to open new action). So, accompanied by rather literal translations, compare and contrast 25–26a (which displays the former order),

> Þa stod on stæðe   stiðlice clypode
> wicinga ar

[Then stood on the bank, calling out loudly, the Viking messenger]

and 164–66 (with the latter),

> To raþe hine gelette   lidmanna sum,
> þa he þæs eorles   earm amyrde.
> Feoll þa to foldan   fealohilte swurd

[Too quickly one of the seamen prevented him when he injured the noble man's arm. Fell then to the ground the golden-hilt sword]

The first shifts the perspective from Byrhtnoð arraying his men to the ominous arrival of the Viking messenger who just appears as if out of thin air. A new stage in the action opens. The second recounts the fall of the hero's sword consequent upon the Viking injuring the hero's arm; line 166 completes the action begun in 164–65. The first shows initial order (found also at lines 181, 205, 295), the second continuative order (also at lines 134, 147, 261). And so we should expect line 285b, opening with the adverb, to

mark a fresh action, and not the continuation of an assault upon Offa. Accordingly, the only evidence for missing text is the curious absence of an antecedent for 286a *"þone".* No word is fragmentary in lines 283 or 284, no verse lacks its expected stresses or positions; no alliteration is disrupted (even though the poem is not conventional in this respect).

Another explanation for this apparent lack of coherence should be sought and that explanation must begin with a recognition that the syntax of 286a is not unique in the poem. To his translation of line 265, "Then, the hostage heartily help did render them," Lesslie Hall added the following questioning footnote: "Who the hostage is we do not know; probably he was already mentioned in the lost part of the poem. —I am inclined to believe that se is used with the value of an indefinite article here, as it seems to be occasionally elsewhere."[18] The problem of line 286a which has wrongly persuaded some translators to substitute an indefinite article for the demonstrative pronoun is *not* confined to that verse in the poem. Missing antecedents are detectable at other important points in the narrative. Take lines 72–75, for example:

> Se flod ut gewat;   þa flotan stodon gearowe,
> wicinga fela   wiges georne.
> Het þa hæleða hleo   healdan þa bricge
> wigan wigheardne,   se wæs haten Wulfstan

[The flood tide went out. The seafarers were standing ready, many Vikings eager for war. Then the lord of the English heroes commanded a warrior hardy in war to hold the causeway—he was called Wulfstan]

"*Þa* bricge"?—yet *no* bridge or causeway has been mentioned hitherto, even though it now moves centre stage, and plays a dramatic role in hindering battle and in provoking the infamous guile of the Vikings. Another instance illustrates the problem perhaps even more acutely:

> Þa gyt on orde stod   Eadweard se langa,
> gearo and geornful;   gylpwordum spræc
> þæt he nolde fleogan   fotmæl landes,
> ofer bæc bugan,   þa his betera leg.
> He bræc þone bordweall   and wið þa beornas feaht   (lines 273–77)

[Also in the spearhead stood Eadweard the tall, alert, and eager; he spoke words of declaration that he would not flee a foot's measurement of ground and fall back, since his superior lay dead. He broke through the shield-barrier and fought with the warriors]

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18 J. Lesslie Hall, *Judith, Phoenix, and Other Anglo-Saxon Poems translated from the Grein-Wülker Text* (New York: Silver, Burdett, 1902), 53. An indefinite translation of a definite has been offered, for example, at line 168b *þæt word*: "even then, the grey-haired warrior delivered a harangue" (Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 524). See, also, n6 above.

"Þone bordweall"? *What* shield-wall, we surely wonder? This cannot be the Anglo-Saxon "wihaga" (line 102a), for Offa has told everyone most clearly that that was broken by the men fleeing with Godric. And not just simply broken either: "folc totwæmed, scyldburh tobrocen" (241b–42a); the repeated verbal prefix *to-* emphasizes the totality of the fracture. That shield-wall was smashed to smithereens. But no Viking shield-wall has been mentioned. Perhaps, then, the causeway and the hostage and the Viking shield-wall, and so on, were all alluded to in the lost part of the poem? Or perhaps there is missing text before lines 74, 265, 277, as well as 284? I believe there is a simpler explanation.

A poet who knows that his audience also knows the story he is narrating will present it in a manner different from a poet who suspects that they do not. It would be unnecessary, for example, for him to introduce aspects he knew to be understood by them—important characters, motives, and incidents might be alluded to economically, or allusively, or perhaps, even, not at all in their own right. So these demonstratives did, in a way, have antecedents: another lost part of the poem is the poet's presumptions about the knowledge of the intended primary audience. What we have remaining to us is only, as it were, one side of a dialogue.[19] This also goes some way to explaining the genealogical incoherencies in the narrative. Is Æþeric the brother of Sibyrht, or not? *We* do not know, but the sense of lines 280–85a cannot properly be established without that information. Is Offa the kinsman of Gadd, or not? We cannot be sure, and some have wondered whether Gadd's kinsman might have been one of the Vikings or another Englishman.[20] Is Edward the Tall definitely not Edward the Chamberlain, for these two are not distinguished as clearly as the two Godrics? And so on. Either the poet loved obscurity, or he was composing for an audience that knew, or knew of, the participants to whom he refers in this indirect, or elliptical, or (to us) unclear style. The phrasing of "þone sælidan" may, therefore, be of a piece with "se gysel" (the hostage)—*they* knew who was meant, as Wyatt presumes. Accordingly, the key critical question facing us with lines 285b–86 is whether there is sufficient information in the surviving poem to allow us to reconstruct the apparently missing antecedent of "þone sælidan". I believe that there is.

2) *The problem of metrics*. Bliss's condemnation of the inexcusability of line 286a in fact occurs in a context in which he argues broadly to the contrary that the poem "emerges rather creditably from a fresh [metrical] examination." He notes that out of its eighty-one instances of Types 1A and 1A*, only six display single, instead of double, alliteration and that this is "a proportion which does not differ much from that of *Beowulf*."[21] He goes on to argue that, of these six, one may be illusory ("reaf and hringas", line 161a), one is

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19 Such narrative, of course, has *synecdoche* as its major structuring trope, but we now cannot grasp the overall coherence (see Elżbieta Chrzanowska-Kluczewska, "Synecdoche—An Underestimated Macrofigure?" *Language and Literature* 22 (2013): 233–47).

20 See *The Battle of Maldon and Short Poems from the Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Walter John Sedgefield (Boston: Heath, 1904), 38, and Ashdown, *English and Norse Documents*, 89.

21 Bliss, *Metre of Beowulf*, 101, §117.

paralleled in *Beowulf* ("eard gesecan", line 222a),[22] one in his view is corrupt ("Ælfnoð and Wulfmær", line 183a),[23] and two display an acceptable licence ("Offa gemælde", line 230a; "Leofsunu gemælde", line 244a). Only 286a is truly beyond the pale, because both the position of the caesura and the secondary stress in the compound require double alliteration. This is true, but in scanning the verse as Type A, his treatment of it is economic, ignoring the ambiguous metrical status of the compound's second element. Bliss resolves it, in order to scan it as Type 1A, or, more precisely, as Type 1A*2b (cf. *Beo* 736a, "ðicgean ofer þa niht"), but, if this verse had really occurred in *Beowulf*, he would not have resolved that element, because, by Kaluza's Law, the consonantal inflection of -*lidan* would have inhibited resolution, and *Beowulf* abides by this rule.[24] Bliss assumes that such inflections no longer have this effect by the date of *Maldon*'s composition (and in this he is surely correct),[25] but his mixed methodology—on the one hand purportedly scanning *Maldon* by *Beowulf*ian metrical norms, but, then, on the other hand, silently accepting a changed metrics in this case—underestimates the extremeness of this verse's departure from the earlier poem's conservative metrics. If scanned without resolution, the verse would have to be categorized in Bliss's system as an expanded Type 1D*3 (with the two additional unstressed syllables of the demonstrative after the caesura), a type unparalleled in *Beowulf*.[26] One other verse in the poem shows the same metrical pattern, "wyrcan þone wihagan" (line 102a), but, in this instance, with the required double alliteration.[27] So, verse 286a, alone in *Maldon*, displays four departures from the metrical rules of *Beowulf*:

(i) the position of the caesura (in Bliss's description of the caesura) requires double alliteration,
(ii) the compound in second position requires double alliteration,
(iii) the presence of the second dip requires double alliteration,
(iv) Kaluza's Law is either violated, or the verse has a metrical shape unparalleled in *Beowulf*.

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22 Bliss compares *Beo* 682a, "rand geheawe" and 3078a, "wræc adreogan."

23 The line lacks alliteration. On this absence, see Mark Griffith, "Alliterative Licence and the Rhetorical Use of Proper Names in *The Battle of Maldon*," in *Prosody and Poetics in the Early Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of C. B. Hieatt*, ed. M. J. Toswell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 60–79.

24 See Bliss, *Metre of Beowulf*, chap. 4.

25 It would, in any case, be eccentric to argue that the *Maldon*-poet showed, in the one verse, extreme conservatism on the one hand (in abiding by Kaluza's Law), but licentious disregard for the basic rule of alliteration on the other.

26 Nearest are *Beo* 473a and 1724b, but neither has a compound in second position, and in both substitution of the uninflected infinitive regularizes the metre.

27 See R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), chap. 6, 163, §176.

Because of this, Hutcheson, who first scans both of these verses as "hyper-expanded D-types," finally makes them both depart less from the metrical tradition by asserting (without argument) that "the article may be omitted in the two *Mald* attestations"![28]

Should we then assume that the scribe(s) made mistakes and wrongly inserted demonstratives in these verses? Certainly, *Beo* 9b, "þara ymbsittendra" has often been understood in this way: Fulk comments that the demonstrative there is "likely enough a scribal insertion, since it produces unusual meter ... and is stylistically less desirable, given that the context does not justify definite usage and the poet generally avoids unnecessary demonstratives."[29] But where "þara" stands out as unusual in *Beowulf*, *Mald* 286a, "þone" can hardly be so described. Although Old English verse shows generally far fewer demonstratives than the prose and a scribe facing the different system of verse might occasionally have slipped into prosaic use, *Maldon* is very different, showing eighty-three examples of the pronoun *se*, *seo*, *þæt* in 325 lines, beside, for example, only 7 in 73 lines in *Brunanburh*, a more traditional poem which is typical in this regard.[30] If the form is not original, then, either a scribe systematically added demonstratives to a text of the poem which was normal in this respect, and so behaved differently from other scribes of the poetry, or, alternatively, a scribe sometimes added them to a poem which already used them more than usual, and did so, at least here, at a point where it was "stylistically less desirable, given that the context does not justify definite usage." Neither of these propositions is appealing. Many of the poem's demonstratives must be original. Some are metrically necessary (verses 121a, 148a, and 151a, would otherwise be metrically short; 182a would have irregular anacrusis), some are syntactically required (77a and 151a would otherwise require strong forms of the adjective), some are deictically necessary (32a, 52b, 212a, 245b, 312–13a, 316a, 322b, 325a), two are embedded onomastically in epithets (155b, 273b), some appear to be part of idiomatic patterns unlikely to be added by a scribe (as nobleman or noble man, Byrhtnoð is referred to as *se eorl*—at 6a, 28a, 89a, 159b, 165a, or *se beorn*—at 131b, 154a, 160a, or *se goda*—187a), some are obviously deliberate (for example, the contrast of the Viking messenger's euphemistic "*the* money" in verses 35a and 40a, and Byrhtnoð's firm correction: "*our* money"). We might wonder too why a scribe in his copying would only, or mainly, introduce demonstratives at points which lacked justification for definite usage?

Perhaps, then, the compound should be emended to a form that does alliterate? The most minimal change would be to presume that the initial *s*- is scribal, leaving *ælida*, with <æ> for <ea>, and the compound meaning—possibly—"sea-farer" (cf. *And* 251b, "ēa-līðend," sea-farer), with a scribe having added the *s*- to make sense of an unfamiliar term. But *ēa-līda* is not attested; DOE records only one spelling of <æ> for *ēa* "river, water" out

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28 B. R. Hutcheson, *Old English Poetic Metre* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), 149.

29 *Klaeber's Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 112.

30 See Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, §336. Different counts of the usage in *Maldon* follow from the ambiguity of *þa* as either pronoun or adverb at lines 96, 228, 261.

of some five hundred occurrences of the word;[31] and <æ> is not elsewhere found in the transcript as a spelling for *ēa*.[32] The sense "river," found in the *hapax* compound *ēa-steð*, "river-bank" (line 63a), the bank of the Pante on which the messenger stands, would, also, hardly be appropriate for a roving piratical Viking who has crossed the North Sea. In his review of Bliss's book, Stanley takes issue with his remarks about verse 286a and its supposed inexcusability, saying that "the categorist has turned law-giver, and judge and jury too … If the sense and grammar of the transmitted text are all right it is best to leave it alone."[33] The broad sense and the grammar of these lines indeed seem all right, and the most obvious improvements by emendation *metri causa*—removal of the demonstrative, or creation of vocalic alliteration in the compound—are not convincing. The metre, however, remains extraordinary.

3) *The aesthetic problem.* In the usual understanding of lines 285b–94, the mismatch between the apparent slightness of Offa's achievement in his final action and the eloquence of the obituary given him in lines 289–94 has not been fully grasped. One strength of Pope's position is that he senses this problem: in his reconstruction, Offa attacks his opponent *despite being mortally wounded* and yet manages to kill him, a considerably greater deed than the surviving text attests to. On the surface of things, Offa is greatly outmatched in his deeds by those of the others around him. Edward the Tall also perseveres at the front ("on orde," line 273a) where Offa is presumably also fighting (although we are not told this in as many words), but this Edward crashes through the Viking shield-wall and fights with them directly (277), a deed requiring great strength and suicidal courage: worthy vengeance for his lord, as the poet confirms in lines 278–9. Offa does nothing of the sort. Wistan the son of Thurstan also fights against the men (the plural phrasing of 298b, "wið þas secgas feaht" closely echoing that of 277b, "wið þa beornas feaht," "fought against the men") and kills three in the throng (299). Offa kills but one,[34] and is not said to fight against Vikings *en masse*. Even the hostage, who must have been unarmed at the start of proceedings, manages to shoot arrows frequently, at times wounding men, for as long as he is able (265–72).[35] Nor does Offa's vengeance seem to shine by comparison with other explicit acts of vengeance in the battle. Edward the Chamberlain's requital for the slaying of Wulfmær, the sister-son of Byrhtnoð (113–15), appears to be instant (it is the next

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31 See *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, 6 vols., ed. John Mitchell Kemble (London: Sumptibus Societatis, 1839–1848), vol. 1, no. 16, Hlóðhari of Kent, 21, in the name *uuestan ae.*

32 But note the late spelling <wærd> for <wearð> in line 116a.

33 *EPS* 8 (1963), 47–53 at 52.

34 It is true that Ælfwine is also stated to kill merely one Viking (lines 226–8a), but he continues to exhort the men and (unlike Edward, Offa and Wistan) his death is not recorded. See on this, further, below.

35 If there were an onus on a hostage to fight for his captor, as some have argued, then Æscferð would have been armed from the outset, but his late entry into the fighting would then be inexplicable. The timing suggests a change of heart on his part and a realization that the Vikings are his real enemy.

act narrated, in lines 116–19), accomplished with matching severity ("swiðe," lines 115b, 118a), and in the sight of the uncle whose loss is grievous (120–121). Wulfmær the Young plucks the bloody spear from the badly injured Byrhtnoð (152–55) and hurls it back again, killing its sender (156–58). Godric, son of Æþelgar, encourages everyone on (320), throws spears at the Vikings "often" (321b), advances "foremost" (323b), and cuts down and kills Vikings, until he too is slain (324). There is a sense of immediacy and of hyperbole in these actions. All are highly poetic in nature. Edward the Chamberlain's swordplay is introduced by the poet in his own person, uniquely in the poem ("gehyrde ic," line 117a). The second Godric, fighting with spears and sword, is contrasted emphatically with the first Godric, who runs away. The wondrous accuracy of Wulfmær's marksmanship and the near insanity of Edward the Tall's berserk behaviour are self-evidently the stuff of heroic romance. No such features characterize the vengeance of Offa, despite his close relationship with his lord and despite his social importance in the military group. The great praise for him does not seem to arise from any great action by him. He is a conspicuous figure in the poem, but his end seems not to be so. Does this single, understated slaying, encompassed in merely three verses of seemingly plain statement (at least in translation), really merit his thanely placement beside his lord?

From this review we may conclude that:

(1) the argument for missing text in this section of the poem is weak, and the pattern of demonstratives without antecedents suggests instead an audience familiar with the story.
(2) Pope's hypothesis that there is missing text does not address the metrical problem of line 286a. No persuasive case has been made for emendation of that verse *metri causa*; its metrical exceptionality remains unexplained.
(3) the aesthetic problem of the context, virtually ignored in the criticism of the poem, has been shown to be acute, but also awaits explanation.

We have reached base camp.

Towards the Summit

So far, the problem of the absence of double alliteration from verse 286a has been considered only from the perspective of metre. Two other approaches further help characterize the omission:

1) *Register*: Old English poetry displays many poetic words for commonly occurring ideas, especially for "battle," "warrior," "lord," and for types of weapons. As a poem about a battle, *Maldon* is rich in this lexis. Poetic words and poetic meanings (of otherwise non-poetic words)[36] are high in "rank," that is, they alliterate in very high proportions,

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36 The definition of this is empirical: i.e. "poetic" means attested only, or with disproportionate frequency, in the surviving poetic records. For a list, see Mark Griffith, "Poetic Language and the

where non-poetic words and senses alliterate less frequently.[37] Poetic words in the second position of the line ought, therefore, to alliterate. The following words (which are either confined, or mainly confined, to poetry, or are poetic in a particular sense, or are *hapax legomena*) display alliteration (with line numbers in brackets):

Simplexes: *beorn* (101, 154, 182), *bord* (284), *cellod* (283), *ecg* ("sword," 60), *eorl* (28, 203), *feorh* (317), *flyht* (71), *folde* (54, 166), *folme* (21, 150), *frea* (16), *freod* (39), *gram* (100), *greot* (315), *guþ* (13, 94, 187, 321), *hild* (55, 123, 223, 288), *hleo* (74), *iren* ("sword," 253), *metod* (175), *wicg* (240).

Affixed forms: *abeodan* (27), *afysan* (3), *gebræc* (of shields, 295), *getoht* (104).

Compounds: *beaduræs* (111), *brunecg* (163), *feorhhus* (297), *forðgeorn* (281), *fyrdrinc* (140), *garberend* (262), *guðplega* (61), *guðrinc* (138), *hilderinc* (169), *lagustream* (66), *sæman* (38), *wigheard* (75), *wihaga* (102).[38]

Forty-seven poetic words in this position alliterate out of fifty-three attested, or 88.7 per cent, a quite remarkable proportion (especially given the uncertainty of our knowledge in this area). These forty-seven form one-third of the a-verses in the poem with double alliteration (141 in total), which is also very striking. *Maldon* obviously adheres to the traditional system with rigour and its poetic diction is productive and helpful to the poet.[39]

The following do not alliterate:

26a	wicinga ar
42a	Byrhtnoð maþelode
230a	Offa gemælde
244a	Leofsunu gemælde
286a	Offa þone sælidan
309a	Byrhtwold maþelode

Four of these, 42a, 309a, 230a, and 244a contain in second position poetic finite verbs meaning "made a speech." Bliss's observation that 230a and 244a contain a useful

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Paris Psalter: The Decay of the Old English Tradition," Appendix I, *ASE* 20 (1991): 167–86 at 183–85, and note DOE's indications *passim* of restricted poetic usage in the dictionary, A–I.

37 The study of "rank" began in Middle English poetics: see August Brink, *Stab und Wort im Gawain*, Studien zur Englischen Philologie (Halle: Niemeyer, 1920); Marie Borroff, *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study*, Yale Studies in English 152 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 52–90. For the main initial work in Old English, see Dennis Cronan, "Alliterative Rank in Old English Poetry," *SN* 58 (1986): 145–58.

38 *Hapax legomena* (at lines 102, 111, 281, 283, 297) are included; several of these include poetic simplexes. *Wihaga* (line 102) occurs elsewhere only in a scratched gloss to Sedulius, *Carmen Paschale* I, line 344 (but cf. *bord-*, *cumbol-*).

39 See Mark Griffith, "On the Lexical Property termed 'Rank' in Old English Poetry and its Later Development," *N&Q* 258 (2013): 1–14.

verb which "it would be unreasonable to restrict ... to proper nouns beginning with *M-*" applies also to 42a and 309a.[40] *Maþelian* is used frequently elsewhere in the corpus in the second position of the line with a preceding named subject which carries the alliteration: it is a licence accepted by at least some of the poets.[41] Verse 26a, "Vikings' messenger" is licentious in a fashion not entirely dissimilar—restricting the poetic noun *ar* to groups, or tribes, with names beginning with vowels would reduce its utility sharply and would require a more extensive vocabulary for the concept of "envoy" than the poetry possesses.[42] Verse 286a again stands out as exceptional: a special word in the poet's vocabulary does not receive the customary special treatment, and does not appear to be explicable as a pragmatic licence.[43] A study of the poem's diction and use of rank does not support the idea, however, that the poet did not understand his poetic inheritance.

2) *Metrical-grammar*: The metrical-grammatical rules in *Beowulf* for the alliteration of a stressed element in the a-verse after an alliterating word are various,[44] and *Maldon* does not always follow them,[45] but the irregularity of 286a is the more sharply defined by contextualization in this system. These rules are as follows (moving from left to right in the verse):

a. a verbal prefix occurs in anacrusis before the first main stress of a verse of Types A or D (e.g. *Beo* 1151a, "forhabban in hreþre").
Regular verses: 90a, 138a, 212a, 223a, 228a. Irregular verses: none.

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40 Bliss, *Metre of Beowulf*, 102. *GenB* 790a, "Adam gemælde," suggests that Bliss's view is correct. The Old Saxon source gives only the extra-metrical *inquit* phrase *quað Adam* in the first verse, from which the OE versifier forges a new line; he seems unlikely to have done that in this way if he felt it broke the alliterative rules.

41 Twenty-six times in *Beowulf* with seven different subjects, none beginning with *m-*. In other heroic poetry, note also *Wald II* 11a, "Waldere mað[.]lode." Elsewhere it occurs in a limited range of the poems only: *GenA* (twice), *GenB* (twice), *El* (nine times), *Rid* 38 (once). Either some poets eschewed the licence, or did not feel the connotations of the verb appropriate in Christian poetry. Curious is the fact that Cynewulf uses the verb freely in *Elene*, but not in his other signed poems.

42 Beside the simplex *ar*, the language offers only *boda*, *ferend*, *sand*. Such pragmatism generates licence elsewhere in the poem, for example in a-verse patronymics in which proper names opening with different sounds precede *bearn*, of which DOE I.B.1.a. notes "in genitival phrases identifying an individual, especially a hero, by naming his father (only in poetry)."

43 That is, unlike verses of the type *Byrhtnoð maþelode*, this verse does not belong to any recognizable type of formula where relaxation of the rules governing double alliteration greatly increases the utility of the formula to the poets.

44 See Bliss, *Metre of Beowulf*, chaps. 2, 5, 6, and Calvin B. Kendall, *The Metrical Grammar of Beowulf*, CSASE 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), chaps. 8, 9, 10.

45 In lines 80a and 183a, a stressed element in first position does not alliterate, and there is postponed alliteration (80a), or no alliteration (183a). These verses are undoubtedly irregular, but to such a degree that they cannot be appraised by the rules of *Beowulf*.

b1. a displaced finite verb alliterates in first position (e.g. *Beo* 323a, "song in searwum").
Regular verses: 154a, 283a. Irregular verses: none.

b2. an undisplaced alliterating finite verb is the only sentence particle before the first stressed element of the verse clause (e.g. *Beo* 49a, "geafon on garsecg").
Regular verses: 43a, 66a, 96a,[46] 127a, 194a, 212a, 252a, 254a, 284a. Irregular verses: none.

b3. an alliterating infinitive is in first position (*Beo* 119a, "swefan æfter symble").
Regular verses: 4a, 10a, 38a, 90a, 102a, 126a,[47] 150a, 236a, 247a, 248a. Irregular verses: none.

c. a proclitic in the first dip precedes the second stressed element.

c1. the proclitic is a prefix (*Beo* 29a, "swæse gesiþas").
Regular verses: 3a, 12a, 31a, 104a, 131a, 153a, 229a, 242a,[48] 245a, 248a, 250a, 296a, 302a, 305a. Irregular verses: 222a, 230a, 244a.

c2. the proclitic is a preposition (*Beo* 36a, "mærne be mæste").
Regular verses: 4a, 8a, 10a, 12a, 13a, 21a, 28a, 31a, 39a, 55a, 76a, 94a, 99a, 101a, 103a, 104a, 118a, 123a, 126a, 131a, 150a, 153a, 154a, 187a, 214a, 223a, 227a, 228a, 232a, 233a, 235a, 245a, 248a, 259a, 288a,[49] 292a, 302a, 315a, 321a. Irregular verses: none.

c3. the proclitic is a possessive or demonstrative pronoun (*Beo* 521a, "leof his leodum," 110a "Metod for þy mane").
Regular verses: 8a, 10a, 28a, 76a, 102a, 111a, 118a, 138a, 140a, 154a, 182a, 227a, 228a, 240a,[50] 305a, 312a, 313a. Irregular verses: 286a.

c4. the proclitic is a copulative conjunction (*Beo* 97a, "leomum ond leafum").
Regular verses: 15a, 44a, 54a, 161a,[51] 163a, 192a, 229a, 236a, 237a, 253a, 274a, 281a, 304a. Irregular verses: none.

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46 Line 96a belongs here if *þa* is a demonstrative (but there is then triple alliteration); if it is an adverb, then there is a particle before the first stressed element.

47 For the verb see *Beo* 2509b, and note *The Old English "Exodus", Text, Translation, and Commentary by J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Joan Turville-Petre (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981), 51.

48 Perhaps 242a should be excluded from the list on the ground that the second stressed element appears to alliterate with the second element of the compound in first position (*scyldburh*).

49 With *hraðe* for <raðe>; cf. *Beo* 1914a.

50 The metrical-grammar of 240a is, however, unusual in that the demonstrative is displaced from its normal position before the adjective. The preposition is in anacrusis.

51 161a is regular if <hringas> shows *hr > r*.

d. there is a compound in second position (*Beo* 54a, "leof leodcyning").[52]
  Regular verses: 38a, 61a, 66a, 75a, 102a, 111a, 138a, 140a, 163a, 169a, 262a, 281a, 297a. Irregular verses: 219a, 286a.

The results may be presented in summary fashion:

Type	Regular	Irregular
a	5	0
b1	2	0
b2	9	0
b3	10	0
c1	14	3
c2	39	0
c3	17	1
c4	13	0
d	13	2
Total	122	6
Percentage	95.3	4.7

The irregular verses are as follows:

c1	222a eard gesecan
	230a Offa gemælde
	244a Leofsunu gemælde
c3	286a Offa þone sælidan
d	219a wis ealdorman
	286a Offa þone sælidan

Breaches of metrical-grammatical norms and the irregular use of register are seen to go hand in hand: three of this list, 230a, 244a, and 286a, appeared also in the previous list. Nonetheless *Maldon* emerges from this fresh analysis as almost wholly conforming to the traditional rules, and completely so before the first dip. Of the six exceptions—which

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52 The principle that compounds of their nature must alliterate is now sometimes referred to as Krackow's Law: see Otto Krackow, *Die Nominalcomposita als Kunstmittel im altenglischen Epos* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1903), 42–45. Whether this is, in fact, a real phenomenon, or merely an epiphenomenon (as the cumulative effect of the alliterative rules of line-structure and metre), does not affect the empirical fact that almost all compounds in the poetry alliterate.

represent less than 5 percent of relevant instances[53]—three, verses 222a, 230a, and 244a, have already appeared in Bliss's list of exceptions to the metrical rules which are sanctioned by such licence being relatively frequent in *Beowulf*.[54] In 219a, the lack of double alliteration indicates that the compound was not fully semantic in character, but, rather, subject to lexicalization and loss of stress on the second element.[55] Evidence for this is its frequency of occurrence (DOE counts ca. 1150 occurrences) in prose,[56] the abundance of *–man* in composition in Old English,[57] and the tendency of this compound element to loss of stress in the history of English. The failure of *sælida* to alliterate cannot be so explained: it is rare, confined to poetry with only four occurrences,[58] and *-lida* forms the second element of only one other compound in the language (the hapax "yðlida" at *Beo* 198).[59] Only 286a violates two rules (c3 and d), and no other verse shows a pronoun in the dip without double alliteration. This verse is more irregular than any other a-verse in the poem capable of analysis by the metrical-grammatical rules of *Beowulf*.

But some few irregular verses with single for double alliteration in *Beowulf* do provide a possible context in which to understand this verse. In Type c4 *Beowulf* offers "geongum ond ealdum" (line 72a), "duguþe ond geogoþe" (line 621a), "nean ond feorran" (line 1174a), "dæges ond nihtes" (line 2269a). The instances of c4 in *Maldon* all show double alliteration and semantic consonance across the verse (e.g. "ord and iren"), but the exceptions in *Beowulf* show that oppositional binaries could be conjoined

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53 Note, of course, that, mainly because of the proliferation of demonstratives in *Maldon*, many of the relevant verses appear in more than one list. It must be presumed that plural reasons for double alliteration increased the demand for its occurrence.

54 Eight of the twelve instances of 1A1a with single alliteration in that poem show *ge-* in the first dip (at lines 682, 870, 1250, 1375, 1491, 1658, 1857, 1975), one has *a-* (3078); fourteen of twenty-four instances of 1A*1a have *ge-* in the dip (at lines 98, 603, 624, 777, 805, 871, 996, 1090, 1396, 1908, 2094, 2489, 2859, 2891), three have other prefixes (680, 1055, 2275).

55 On the occasional lexicalization of compounds in *Beowulf*, see Fulk et al., *Klaeber's Beowulf* Appendix C, §39(a), 334, and 334n1.

56 In verse only at *And* 608, *Dan* 684 (with ten occurrences in *PPs*).

57 Bosworth-Toller Supplement lists 68 compounds with *–man* as the second element (T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921).

58 *And* 471, 500, *Mald* 45, 286.

59 In addition, the form in *And* 500, *-leodan* displays back mutation (see Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §§212–13), which implies retention of stress. Fully semantic compounds which fail to alliterate in second position are exceptionally rare in the corpus; apart from *Mald* 286a, I can find only *GenA* 1609, "gast ellorfus"; 1827, 2731, "mæg ælfscieno"; 1968, "wera eðelland" (perhaps lexicalized by analogy with other compounds in *–land*); 2298, "godes ærendgast"; *ChristC* 1297, "earges flæschoman" (perhaps lexicalized by analogy with *lichoma*); *PPs* 103.14.3 "must and windrinc." In others, the compound is very probably lexicalized (occurring frequently, and in prose). Why *GenA*, an early poem, should offer the most exceptions is unclear; curious too is the fact that in all five the compound opens with a vowel.

in a single verse with suspension of the requirement for the extra alliteration. Partly this was pragmatically motivated, partly it borrowed from idiomatic binaries which still survive ("far and near," "young and old," "night and day"), but, an implication which comes with this is that semantic contrast across the verse might be expressed by single alliteration in metrical types which otherwise require double. Line 286a, however, is not a grammatical binary nor an idiomatic one, and does not belong to Type c4; it belongs to Type c3. Exceptions to the alliterative rule of other c-types do occur elsewhere in the corpus: quite numerous examples of single alliteration in Type c2 occur in *The Metres of Boethius*, but the poetics of this work have been bent away from the norm by the influence of the prose source. In traditional or "classical" verse exceptions to this rule are few. I have tried to show elsewhere that in *Beo* 665a, "cwen to gebeddan," the only exception to rules c1 and c2 in that poem, the poet "deliberately overrode the rules of his metrical grammar for expressive effect," thereby creating a provocative dissonance between the two nouns.[60] A productive way to view the metrical-grammar of line 286a, then, is to see it as evincing this kind of licence, but moved from Types c1, 2 and 4, to c3. Offa and the seafarer are opposed as enemies, and the absence of alliteration rhetorically exaggerates that violent antipathy—there can be no assonance or consonance between these two—and this lends unusual prominence to the verse and its phrasing.
To the Top ...

The New View

The near verbatim repeat of verses 277b and 298b shows, as has already been seen, that meaning in the poem is sometimes created by the use of parallelism and verbal echo. This technique is deployed in a *structured* fashion by the poet.[61] Near the end of the fragment, just after Byrhtwold has finished speaking, we are told:

> Swa hi Æþelgares bearn   ealle bylde
> Godric to guþe.   (lines 320–1a)

[Æþelgar's son, Godric, also encouraged them all to the fray]

This simple statement recapitulates most of line 209:

> Swa hi bylde forð   bearn Ælfrices

[The son of Ælfric urged them onwards]

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60 Mark Griffith, "Verses quite like *cwen to gebeddan* in *The Metres of Boethius*," *ASE* 34 (2005): 145–67. The quotation is from Kendall, *Metrical Grammar of Beowulf*, 140.

61 On the structured use of parallelism and word echo in OE poetry, see Adeline Courtney Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature 122 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), chap. 3; John O. Beaty, "The Echo-Word in *Beowulf* with a Note on the *Finnsburg* Fragment," *PMLA* 49 (1934): 365–73; Constance B. Hieatt, "Dream Frame and Verbal Echo in *The Dream of the Rood*," *NM* 72 (1971): 251–63;

"Swa hi," "bearn," and "bylde," are repeated, but the order is inverted and the later line shows crossed alliteration.[62] Both, however, show the exhortations of the men described in much the fashion that Byrhtnoð exhorted them: "hyssas bylde, bæd gangan forð" (169b–70a). The hero's injunction that the men should advance is itself a repetition of part of his first orders that the men should "forð gangan" (3b), which they enact repeatedly (225a "forð eode," 229b, 260a "forð eodon," 297b "forð ða eode"). The narrator is keen to demonstrate that the loyal men carried out their lord's bidding. His words are their law.

Two lines of the poem, 42 and 309, form near exact repetitions of one another:

> Byrhtnoð maþelode,   bord hafenode

[Out spoke Byrhtnoð; he lifted his shield]

> Byrhtwold maþelode,   bord hafenode

[Byrhtwold held forth, heaved up his shield]

Verbatim, or near verbatim, line repeats within OE poems are very rare, and were presumably prominent to an audience.[63] Adding to the strength of the echo is the fact that only these two speech introductions in the poem deploy the verbs *maþelian* and *hafenian* (with a chiming inflectional rhyme and a remarkable assonance);[64] only these two speakers raise their shields and brandish their spears ("wand wacne æsc," line 43a; "æsc acwehte," line 310b), and *æsc* is found in the poem only in these two verses.[65] What links the hero and the *geneat*? The similarity of name suggests kinship, but we have no strong evidence.[66] The two are also the only speakers characterized as teaching

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Eugene R. Kintgen, "Echoic Repetition in Old English Poetry, Especially *The Dream of the Rood*," *NM* 75 (1974): 202–23; Barbara C. Raw, *The Art and Background of Old English Poetry* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), 123–26.

62 The difference may mean that greater significance was attached to the name of Æþelgar than to that of Ælfric. On the treason of Ælfric, *ealdorman* of Mercia from 983, banished in 985 or 986, see M. A. L. Locherbie-Cameron, "Ælfwine's Kinsmen and *The Battle of Maldon*," *N&Q* 25 (1978): 486–87.

63 Compare *Beo* 197, 790, 806, "in that age of this life": the remoteness of the past is insistently recognized by the poet.

64 There is exact repetition of short vowels, *a-e-o-e*, in open syllables, with different consonants before the final inflectional rhyme. *Hafenian* occurs elsewhere in the poetic corpus only at *Beo* 1573b, "wæpen hafenade." On rhyme in the poetry, see Friedrich Kluge, "Zur Geschichte des Reimes im Altgermanischen," *BGdSL* 9 (1884): 422–50. On word-internal vocalic repetitions across the line in alliterative poetry, see Winfred P. Lehmann, *The Alliteration of Old Saxon Poetry*, Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap Suppl. Bind III (Oslo: Aschehoug (Nygaard), 1953), 26–30.

65 For further discussion of the case for accepting "the implications of meaning generated by the formulaic echo in these two passages," see Stanley B. Greenfield, *The Interpretation of Old English Poems* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 55–58.

66 Byrhtelm, Byrhtnoð's father, shares the same first name-element (line 92a), and other kin with common name elements occur (Wulfmær and his father Wulfstan (line 155), and the sons of Odda (lines 187–92)). Note also that the repetition in the OHG *Hildebrandslied* of *Hiltibrant gimahalta*

the men ("rincum tæhte," line 18b; "beornas lærde," line 311b), and both too are old ("har hilderinc," line 169a; "eald geneat," line 310a). "Both transcend their age in virility and *virtus*," exemplifying the type known as the *senex fortis*.[67] So, this shared role and characterization perhaps generated the common opening to their speeches.[68] In any case, the introduction to the hero's great speech to the Viking messenger is re-cycled almost verbatim and so, when Byrhtwold speaks, we sense the ghost of Byrhtnoð behind him: both speakers share a proud belief that some things are worth more than life itself.

This speech to the messenger controls the action that follows—the hero has promised battle and so battle must take place—but its governing power goes well beyond this. Particulars of its language thread through the remainder of the fragment: it is the pivot around which the poem turns, dictating the words and actions of the hero and his men alike. No such use, by contrast, is made of Byrhtnoð's final speech to God.[69] In a short, but important, article which deserves greater recognition, Christopher Ball draws attention to an important scheme of repetitions across the first half of the poem which are wholly generated by the reply to the Viking messenger. Byrhtnoð promises that his men will give battle, not tribute:

> Hi willað eow to gafole   garas syllan,
> ættrynne ord   and ealde swurd,
> þa heregeatu   þe eow æt hilde ne deah.   (lines 46–48)

[They will give you spears as tribute, the poison-tipped javelin and ancient swords, those warlike accoutrements which will profit you nothing in battle.]

I quote Ball's evidence and argument: " When in due course Byrhtnoth enters the battle he does indeed offer *gar(as), ættrynne ord and eald(e) swurd* ... Byrhtnoth fights three Vikings before he dies: in each combat he is shown using the weapons he had promised

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(lines 7, 45) and *Hadubrant gimahalta* (lines 14, 36) together with the repeated patronymic in the second case of *Hiltibrantes sunu* appears designed to remind us of their kinship (see Hatsuko Matsuda, *Direct Speech in Beowulf: Its Formal Presentation and Functions* (unpublished PhD diss., Bristol University, 2018), 47–49). Hildebrandslied quotations are taken from Klaeber 4.

67 J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 131.

68 For the types of speeches introduced by the poetic verb *maþelian* and the severe constraints on its use, see Roderick W. McConchie, "The Use of the Verb *Maþelian* in *Beowulf*," *NM* 101 (2000): 59–68.

69 Except that the indirect speech of 147b–48 anticipates its first theme of gratitude. The majority of the stressed words of the speech, however, occur nowhere else in the poem: 173, "geþancian," "waldend"; 174, "wynn," "woruld," "gebidan"; 175, "milde"; 176, "gast" (god, n.), "ge-unnan"; 177, "sawul"; 178, "geweald," "engel"; 179, "ferian," "frymdi"; 180, "helsceaða." This may be characterized as a contrast of public speech (to the messenger) and private (to God), and/or one of genre (of *beot* and prayer), or simply one of poetic utility: the first speech is central to the poet's grand design, the death speech is not. In any case, in a poem which makes use of variation and repetition, the local absence of such devices is also noteworthy.

in his first speech. The exact words recur, and in the same order." The lines Ball addresses are as follows:[70]

> Gegremod wearð se guðrinc: he mid gare stang
> wlancne wicing   þe him þa wunde forgeaf   (lines 138–39)

[The warrior was enraged; with a spear he struck the presumptuous viking who had given him the wound]

> Ða he oþerne   ofstlice sceat
> þæt seo byrne tobærst: he waes on breostum wund
> þurh ða hringlocan;   him æt heortan stod
> ætterne ord   (lines 143–46)

[Then he rapidly hurled a second, so that the mail-coat burst; he was wounded in the breast through the linked rings—at his heart stood the poisonous point]

> Þa Byrhtnoð bræd   bill of sceðe
> brad and bruneccg,   and on þa byrnan sloh.
> To raþe hine gelette   lidmanna sum,
> þa he þæs eorles   earm amyrde.
> Feoll þa to foldan   fealohilte swurd   (lines 162–66)

[Then Byrhtnoth drew sword from sheath, broad and bright of blade, and struck against the corslet. All too quickly one of the shipmen hindered him, since he crippled the earl's arm. The golden hilted sword then fell to the earth]

The central ethic of the poem dictates that deeds must match the words which promise those deeds. Ball shows that, by a strategy of intratextual repetition, the poet demonstrates with economical precision the hero's discharging of his verbal commitments to the Viking.[71] What might have seemed at first glance a catalogue of weapons appropriate only to the emotion of the moment or even mere padding, proves to be one that guides the hero's behaviour, and our perception of that, from that moment onwards.

In similar vein, Byrhtnoð stirringly vows to defend his lord's people and country and to kill the heathen invaders:

> þæt her stynt unforcuð   eorl mid his werode
> þe wile gealgean   eþel þysne,
> Æþelredes eard,   ealdres mines
> folc and foldan.   Feallan sceolon
> hæþene æt hilde.   (lines 51–55a)

[that here stands a worthy earl with his troop of men who is willing to defend this his ancestral home, the country of Æthelræd, my lord's nation and land. The heathens shall perish in battle.]

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70 Christoper J. E. Ball, "Byrhtnoth's Weapons and *The Battle of Maldon*," *N&Q* 36 (1989): 8–9.

71 For analysis of further examples, see Griffith, "Alliterative Licence," 66–67, 69–70.

Two of the stressed elements of line 50 are repeated and varied no less than three times in the later parts of the poem, also with shared consonance:

Feoll þa to *foldan*	fealohilte swurd	(line 166)
Þa wearð a*feallen*	þæs *folces* ealdor,	
Æþelredes eorl		(lines 202–3a)
flotan on þam *folce*,	þæt se on *foldan* læg	(line 227)

All three possible combinations of two of the three alliterands are collocated. Although the hero promises death to the Vikings, in the end, it is he who falls to the ground (166). The narrator's words poignantly pick up on the hero's promise: it was not meant to happen like this. The promise is recalled again in 202–3a, together with Æþelred's name from 53a, "ealdor" from 53b and "eorl" from 51b (with enjambed alliteration reprising the continued alliteration of 51–53 which also binds these three words together). In narratological terms this statement is wholly otiose, for we already know that the hero is dead, hewn down in line 181, but the poetically motivated recapitulation of a whole network of words from lines 51–54 marks the initiation of the vengeance of his *heorðgeneatas*. They will turn his bold words into deeds, or die in the attempt. Pleonasm turns out to be purposeful. The vengeance of Ælfwine in line 277 echoes the same promise for one last time: *folc* and *foldan* recurs from line 54a. Ælfwine may be seen to kill only a single Viking, but that is narrated in the most appropriate manner, deploying Byrhtnoð's own collocation. Given that Byrhtnoð's speech is merely seventeen lines long and that its phrasing responds in some detail to the *preceding* speech of the Viking messenger,[72] that it looks forwards as much as backwards, that its terms are reiterated and, in so far as this was possible, vindicated in the later parts of the poem is a most considerable poetic achievement.

One final later echo of that momentous speech remains to be discussed,[73] which the poet creates partly by lexical repetition, partly by shared position in the line, and partly by breaking the normal rules almost to pieces:

Gehyrest þu sælida,	hwæt þis folc segeð?	(line 45)
Offa þone sælidan,	þæt he on eorðan feoll	(line 286)

In both cases the rare poetic compound *sælida*, closing the a-verse in each line, ought to alliterate normally, but in neither does it do so—not at all in 286, and in 45, the only two stressed elements, the nouns *sælida* and *folc*, which ought to alliterate together by rule, fail to do so. By contrast, every other word in the poem denoting "seafarer" or

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72 In brief, line 45 responds to 29–30a; 46, "to gafole garas" plays with 32, "garræs mid gafole"; 48, "heregeatu" punningly offers "gafol" in weapons; 50b and 60–61 answer 31–33; 56a corrects 40a; 59 parallels 33.

73 Although other meaningful reiterative patterns are in evidence. The narrator, for example, later touches twice on Byrhtnoð's punning use of "heregeatu" (line 48, "war-gear", but also "heriot/tax"). Eadweard's violent slaughter of a Viking with his sword is termed "compensation" (116, "wiþerlean"). The Vikings perceive that they have encountered "bricgweardas bitere" (85) and

"Viking"—an extensive vocabulary—alliterates normally.[74] This lexical repetition and shared departure from the alliterative rules irresistibly draws these lines together.[75] In line 286a, the poet has created a verse which cries out against the normal rules in almost every possible respect, without quite lying outside them altogether—a verse which is almost inexcusable (to paraphrase Bliss), and which was presumably nearly excruciating to a conservative audience. We are meant to notice this, we are intended to hear this echo—indeed, it is vital that we do so. Now we are in a position to understand the function of the strange demonstrative "þone" in line 286a: as with "þis" in line 45b ("what *these* people are saying"), it functions with deictic force (*pace* Wyatt, above) to remind us, laconically in this case, of the previous occurrence of the compound.[76] Offa kills *that* sea-wanderer, the one who induced his lord into making an ill-advised promise of battle. Now, too, we can see that the lines following the compound present *no* aesthetic problem. Byrhtnoð's right-hand man cuts down the frontman of the Vikings and avenges Byrhtnoð's death. And when he himself is cut down straight afterwards, then rightly he lies beside his lord *ðegenlice*. And how appropriate this is both within the terms of the poem and within the broader heroic frame of the poetry. The messenger is a man of cunning words, deployed to exact tribute, or to ask for it in such a way that it provokes the proud hero into a fatal promise of battle. Offa, on the other hand, is a man alert to falseness of language: he is the one who sees through the bombast in the *meþelstede* where many spoke boldly whom he knew would afterwards crumble in the crisis. Truth slays deception. Who better for Offa to kill? What greater satisfaction could there be? A productive parallel is offered by *Beowulf*: Hygelac by his rashness lies dead on the Frisian shore, and Beowulf, his closest comrade, avenges him by killing the frontman of the Franks—the only one of them singled out in that episode, and the only human adversary slain by the hero—the standard-bearer Dæghrefn.[77] My feeling is that, at this one moment in the poem's original performance, the audience cheered.

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rightly so, for these "bridge-keepers" have exacted a grim toll from the first to cross (see 77–78, but implied also in 82–83). Or, further, Byrhtnoð's oxymoronic representation of battle as a sort of game (61, "guðplega") is repeated by the narrator (268, "wigplegan"), and by Byrhtwold (316, "wigplegan"). Both are rare poetic compounds ("guðplega" occurs also at *And* 1369, *Fates* 22, *ChristB* 573; "wigplega" only at *Fort* 69) and so are not obviously dead metaphors.

74 Compare "brimliþend" (27), "brimman" (49 and 295), "Dene" (129), "dreng" (149), "flota" (72 and 227), "lidman" (99 and 164), "særinc" (134), "sæman" (29, 38, and 278), "wicing" (26, 73, 97, 116, 139, and 322). Nine items occurring nineteen times in all.

75 Perhaps, too, the sensitive might hear another example of the insistent connection of *folc* (line 45) and *feallan* (286), with *eorðan* substituting for the third member of the triad, *foldan*.

76 "*These* people" in line 45b are contrasted with the Vikings who have been speaking to their messenger (see lines 29–30a). And in both these verses deixis may be implicated in the shared absence of alliteration from the following noun.

77 *Beo* 2490–508a. No relationship was more important to Beowulf than that with Hygelac, just as no relationship is more important to Offa than that with Byrhtnoð. *Beowulf* does not state that Dæghrefn killed Hygelac, but he is a prominent opponent. Beowulf's prime duty was to avenge his lord in the battle and this is why Dæghrefn is the only human said to be killed by him.