



FIG. 12. *Beowulf*, ll. 3178-82.

The Closing Sentence

Figure 12 is a picture of the closing sentence of *Beowulf*. It tells what Beowulf's people said as they spoke sadly of their burnt and buried king: 'In this way the people of the Geats, the hearth-companions, grieved the fall of their lord; said that he would have been the gentlest of men and most accordant, kindest to his people, and most desiring of praise.'

It is really two sentences, as the tree structure illustrates. Yet the second is inseparable from the first. It can't be called subordinate in any usual sense (it does not have a subordinating form or subordinating word order), its dependency lying rather in text-structure. Following a fully formed sentence **Swā begnornodon ... heorðgenēatas** with variant realizations of its subject, the second sentence lacks any realization of its subject. Further, the second sentence is less than independent as well if it is regarded as to some extent a variant of the first: his people's saying is a part of their grieving. Klaeber's punctuation of the passage—semicolon after **heorðgenēatas**, full stop at the end—seems just right, given the conventions of modern pointing. The rhetorical term (*dicolic*) *period* would fit better for the whole.

When this sentence is given voice—so that what the **Gēata lēode** said is *said*—its temporal and prosodic dimensions reappear. It begins with simple enough syntax and a simple variation in its first colon, and moves without subject into a second still with simple enough syntax; this is done, furthermore, in meter that is 'ordinary,' in the sense there are no half-lines with 'clashing stress,' i.e., no verses with juxtaposed metrical ictus. It then concludes with an elaborate subjective complement filling the final two and a half metrical lines—a full half of the period's structure: this final segment lays out a series of superlatives (four, one in each of four successive half-lines) in three Adjective Phrases, each with a different structure distinguished by the syntax of its complement. This pattern is unique in the poem. So is its being cast with the *ritardando* of clashing stress at the end of each of the last three lines. There the sentence ends, the text closes, the voice stops. *Lēoð wæs āsungen*.

3178 swā¹ be⁰-gnornodon² gēata² lēode²
 3179 hlāfordes / ()ΔΔre*hryre³ heorð¹-g=-¹-nēatas¹
 3180 cwædon² þ⁰ hē² wære³ wyruld⁰-()cýning*cýninga /
 3181 ()Δannu=*manna³ mildust³ 7⁰ mon⁻²-()ΔΔærust*ðwærust²
 3182 leodu=³ liðost² 7⁰ lof-/geornost. /
