



FIG. 11. *Beowulf*, ll. 853-56a.

## Incremental Repetition, Expansion, and Deletion

Fig. 11 shows another sentence in *Beowulf* that has been constructed with a quiet, confident virtuosity, one of the many small marvels of parataxis and leap-frogging allowed and enabled by the metrical form of the composition together with the morphosyntactics of the language.

The subject of one clause **eald-gesīðas** ‘old comrades’ is partially repeated as **geong-**[ Δ ] ‘young [comrades]’ in the next; then the two collectively are repeated in the more general **beornas** ‘heroes, warriors’ in the third clause.

The initial predicate is **eft gewiton** ‘started back’ (literally, ‘in return (they) departed’); at the end of the second clause it is extended by an infinitive complement **rīdan**, which itself is modified (or complemented) by **mēarum**, dative plural: the whole verb phrase **eft gewiton mēarum rīdan** is translatable broadly as ‘started back riding on horses.’ (The infinitive in these constructions has been replaced by *-ing* verbals in Modern English.) In turn, a locative phrase is included with the first two clauses, adverb **þanon** ‘thence’ beginning the first one, PrepP **fram mere** ‘from the mere’ beginning the second.

Meantime, **mōdge** ‘brave, high-spirited’ is introduced in the second clause, modifying the tandem subjects: ‘The old comrades started back thence, likewise young (ones) many from the joyous journey, high-spirited, riding horses ....’

Not least remarkable is the three clauses being variants of one another, even while they develop increments along with the repetition. The three clauses are paratactic. The first is simple and complete within a single metrical line. The second enlarges the first, running to two metrical lines, while the third eliminates all but two constituents from its surface form and is complete within a single halfline. This seems to be the necessary interpretation for at least two reasons. The second subject NP is preceded by **swylce**, an adverbial conjunction. These two NPs cannot be direct variants (**eald-** and **geong-** being contraries). Also, the predicate then is enlarged after a second subject NP.

Then consider the structure in terms of the contents of the verse lines. The first line contains a simple clause and has no ellipsis, the second has ellipsis of the head of a compound noun subject of a new clause, the third line skips the verb-adverb constituent of the same clause, and the fourth compresses a clause into a metrical halfline, omitting all but subject and the modifier **on blancum** ‘on horses’ of the infinitive complement.

Besides encoding the sounds of words in succession—lexical items strung along single file—the manuscript text seems to provide some representation of the prosody, providing a sort of performance model. The further information is in the spacings (represented here by numerals) between strings of letters.

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0853	þanon	/	eft	?	ge- <sup>0</sup> -witon	<sup>3</sup>	eald- <sup>3</sup> -ge- <sup>1</sup> -sīðas	<sup>5</sup>
0854	swyl <sup>1</sup> ce	<sup>4</sup>	geong	/	manig	<sup>4</sup>	of <sup>1</sup>	gomen- <sup>3</sup> -wāþe <sup>5</sup>
0855	fram	<sup>3</sup>	mere	<sup>4</sup>	mōdge	/	mēarum <sup>2</sup>	rīdan <sup>5</sup>
0856	beor <sup>2</sup> nas	<sup>4</sup>	on	<sup>2</sup>	blan <sup>2</sup> cum	<sup>3</sup>		

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The end of the sentence is the last of three parallel clauses, which is compressed into a single metrical halfline. Its subject is a synoptic expression of the subjects of the parallel clauses preceding. Its predication has deletion of all but its one ‘lowest level’ constituent.

The manuscript spacing in the final halfline includes separation of the two syllables—not the separate morphemes—of the two nouns. There is no ambiguity or randomness in the pattern, any more than there would be ambiguity or randomness in speech when deliberately paced by analogy with the writing. A deliberate pacing, in fact, will signify by rhetorical effect the phrase being final in the sentence.

The deliberative spacing of **beornas on blancum** is not an oddity in the writing of a final phrase. Another instance is 289a **worda 7 worca**:

0286 weard<sup>3</sup> maþelode<sup>4</sup> ðær<sup>1</sup> on<sup>2</sup> wicge / sæt<sup>4</sup>  
 0287 om<sup>1</sup>be<sup>1</sup>ht<sup>3</sup> un<sup>-1</sup>-forht<sup>3</sup> æg<sup>-2</sup>-hwæ<sup>2</sup>þres<sup>3</sup> sceal /  
 0288 scearp<sup>4</sup> scyld<sup>-3</sup>-wiga<sup>3</sup> ge<sup>-0</sup>-scād<sup>3</sup> witan<sup>4</sup>  
 0289 wor<sup>2</sup>da / 7<sup>0</sup> wor<sup>2</sup>ca<sup>5</sup> sē<sup>1</sup> þe<sup>3</sup> wēl<sup>3</sup> þenceð<sup>4</sup>

Some others are 0704b, 1172a, 0939a, 1058a.

For comparison, here is a passage heavy with variation from *Andreas* and another from *Cædmon's Hymn* with an array of syntactic ‘sames’ that tease the boundary between variation and coordination. The first is *Andreas*, ll. 195b–98a:

con him holma begang,  
 sealte sæstrēamas ond swan-rāde,  
 waroð-faruða gewinn ond wæter-brōgan,  
 wegās ofer wīd-land.

The referent of **him** is God’s angel, whom *Andreas* is proposing to carry out God’s command, rather than *Andreas* himself, on grounds the angel has the needful knowledge and he (*Andreas*) does not (**con him ...**, whereas **ne mē ... cūðe sindon**). The correlative set of NPs are kennings for ‘sea’; some are juxtaposed at line boundaries, some conjoined by **ond** at halfline boundaries. But they rise little above fustian, much like the passage describing the apostles who set out to preach the gospel referring to them as ‘brave chieftains, renowned warriors, when shield and hand on the battlefield defended helmet’:

frome folc-togan ond fyrdhwate,  
 rōfe rincas, þonne rond ond hand  
 on here-felda helm ealgodon ....

But it is another matter in this opening sentence (of the two) of *Cædmon's Hymn*, ll. 1–4:

Nu sculon herigean heofon-rīces weard,  
 meotudes meahte and his mōd-geþanc,  
 weorc wuldor-fæder swa hē wundra gehwæs,  
 ēce drihten, ōr onstealde.

There is no trouble recognizing four NP objects of **herian** ‘praise.’ Some are juxtaposed at line boundaries, two are conjoined by **and** at halfline boundary. The problem is in distinguishing variants (‘similar or equal’) from coordinates (‘(an)other’). The passage provides a ‘hovering yet concentration of meaning,’ as another poet<sup>1</sup> expressed it nearly twelve hundred years after Cædmon. Another gem pressed into brilliance by syntax and meter.

<sup>1</sup>Edwin Arlington Robinson.