

Dobbie's Attitude toward Metrical Evidence in the ASPR Edition of *Beowulf*

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In their influential editions of Old English poetry (Krapp and Dobbie 1931–53), the editors promulgate a negative attitude toward the metrical system proposed by Sievers (1893). Today editors are reluctant to emend Old English poems for metrical reasons alone. Here I focus on the distribution of manuscript verses, which provides much stronger metrical evidence than is generally realized. A metrical rule with one or two exceptions in the manuscript is now often regarded as invalid, but when the number of exceptions is compared with the number of instances in which the rule holds true, some verse patterns rejected by Sievers are identifiable as gross statistical anomalies. Distributions of manuscript verses are facts, not theories. Conceptually simple emendations for gross anomalies include removal or restoration of optional prefixes and restoration of archaic word orders. Sievers's constraints on metrical form often converge with predictions of a generative theory that explains why the frequencies of manuscript verse patterns are as they are. Judgments of neo-Sieversians are also shown to converge with this theory.

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Differences of opinion about the date of *Beowulf* coincide with disagreements about textual criticism. Those who favor a late date seek to discredit linguistic and metrical evidence to the contrary (Chase 1981). Those who favor an early date defend this evidence (Fulk 1992; Neidorf 2014). Hostility toward historical linguistics and metrical theory is particularly conspicuous among late-daters at present but it is not a new development. It is already well entrenched in volume one of the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records (ASPR; Krapp and Dobbie 1931–53). In his preface, Krapp (1931, v) declares that engaging all previous publications on the Junius manuscript would be a waste of space and provides some very brief comments about his editorial practice.

It becomes necessary therefore to select, and the critical judgment of the editor must be exercised to keep alive these records as illustrious examples of poetic endeavor, not as occasions for stirring the dry bones of Anglo-Saxon scholarship. With these considerations in mind, the texts of the poems in this edition are kept as free as possible of scholarly intrusions, paleographical, typographical, grammatical, or otherwise illustrative and editorial, and the necessary machinery

of exposition and interpretation is placed in the introduction and the notes, where it seems more properly to belong.

Krapp represents his audience as somehow interested in poetry but does not say what kinds of interest are to be addressed in his introduction and notes. It is clearer what kinds of interest are to be excluded.

A major linguistic achievement of Eduard Sievers was the discovery of metrical evidence for Old English vowel length (Pascual 2019). If the first alliteration in a verse occurs on a word with a short stressed vowel followed by a single consonant and a short unstressed vowel, the two short vowels become equivalent to one long vowel by what is called *resolution* and fill one metrical position. A long stressed vowel, on the other hand, always fills a metrical position by itself. Among the scholarly intrusions that Krapp eliminates are marks of vowel length. This has unfortunate consequences. It is impossible to determine whether a pattern of metrical positions corresponds to an acceptable verse pattern—what Sievers (1893) calls a “verse type”—unless the lengths of its stressed vowels are known; and these lengths vary from word to word in an unpredictable way. Detailed discussion of meter is impossibly awkward unless vowel length is specified. Krapp’s imagined audience is interested somehow in poetry but not very interested in poetic form, the defining characteristic of poetry as distinct from prose and ordinary language.

Krapp’s editorial approach was employed by Elliott van Kirk Dobbie in *Beowulf and Judith*, volume four of the ASPR, which appeared in 1953. Like Krapp, Dobbie devoted his entire career to the ASPR and did not publish on metrical theory or historical linguistics. Dobbie contrasts in this respect with Sievers and with Robert D. Fulk, lead editor of the current standard edition of the poem, known as K4 (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008; hereafter cited as K4). Krapp and Dobbie did not publish on editorial theory, and they provide no explicit justification for their editorial practice. An evaluation of Dobbie’s attitude toward metrical evidence has to be extracted from his notes on individual lines.

It is difficult to say how many of Dobbie’s notes on *Beowulf* give significant attention to poetic form but there are certainly fewer than seventy. With vowel length unspecified, discussion of metrical problems is practicable only in the very simplest cases. For anything less simple Dobbie has a three-word formula, “for metrical reasons,” to explain why a previous editor emended a verse. Dobbie resorts to this formula in notes for twenty-seven verses (53b, 262a, 368a, 402b, 459a, 747b, 845a, 947a, 954a, 1187a, 1197a, 1285b, 1514a, 1520b, 1584a, 1644a, 1663b, 1728a, 1759a, 1830b, 1871b, 2150a, 2297a, 2435b, 2481a, 2615b, and 3135b). Dobbie will concede that complete absence of alliteration is a good reason to emend a verse, as in 84a, 332b, 461b, 499a, 949b, 1390b, 1903a, 1981a, 2341b, and 2929b. He also accepts emendations of verses that are too short (6a, 1404b,

1980b, 2299a, 2488a, 2673a, and 3101b). He will not, however, emend 758a or 1537a to provide the second alliteration that normally occurs in a-verses with anacrusis. The K4 editors emend the text to double alliteration in 758a and recommend a plausible alternative for 1537a.

Dobbie's attitude toward metrical theory would be less objectionable if he represented the editor as an advocate for the manuscript in a debate among specialists with varying interests and abilities. In his notes, however, Dobbie represents the critical judgment of the editor as superior in all respects to that of scholarly intruders like historical linguists and metrical theorists. Consider Dobbie's note to the manuscript verse in *Beowulf* 9b, *þāra ymbsittendra* "of the ones living round about." Here *ðāra* would be a two-syllable anacrusis in a verse of type D. Sievers's cancellation of *þāra* is justifiable because constituents in anacrusis are normally monosyllabic and normally consist of unstressed prefixes or negative particles. Old English demonstratives, which often function like the Modern English definite article *the*, do not otherwise occur as anacruses in *Beowulf*. Dobbie declares that "the metrical arguments for omission of this word are not as convincing as they once were" (1953, 113). He feels no need to say who is less convinced or what rendered the metrical evidence obsolete. In their own note to *Beowulf* 9b the editors of K4 observe that metrists generally cancel *þāra* but add that "emendation solely on the basis of meter is now largely avoided" (2008, 112). To acknowledge both scholarly trends among users of K4 the editors print *þāra* in the text of the poem but underdot it for deletion.

Removal of *þāra* by emendation can be justified without appeal to fine points of metrical theory. The relevant generalization is that demonstratives appear before the first alliteration only in verses that would be too short if all words before the first alliteration were removed (Sievers's types A3, B, and C). In *Beowulf* this generalization could be falsified in more than 3800 manuscript verses of types A1, A2, D, and E, but the generalization holds true in every instance but *Beowulf* 9b. The manuscript verse is a gross statistical anomaly. Anacrusis obscures the leftward boundary of verse patterns that normally begin with an alliterating syllable and has correspondingly limited frequency. It typically occurs when a prefixed word is restricted to verse-initial position, as in line 94, *gesette sigehrēþig // sunnan ond mōnan* "the victorious one positioned (the) sun and (the) moon," where the boundary between the a-verse and the b-verse is represented by a double forward slash (/). The prefixed verb *gesette* must stand first in the a-verse because **sigehrēþig gesette* would have an otherwise unattested verse pattern.

Demonstratives in anacrusis are easy to avoid because they can be omitted quite freely in Old English, unlike Modern English demonstratives like *that* or definite articles like *the*. The *Beowulf* poet is also willing to omit demonstratives that are normally required, as in verses like 2105b, *gomela Scilding* "the old

Scylding,” where the weak form of the adjective is used without a preceding demonstrative or article, avoiding anacrusis. This use of the weak adjective is a presumable archaism and is of great interest to historical linguists (K4, cxlix). Since a constituent like *pāra* could so easily be avoided verse-initially, it seems unreasonable to suppose that the poet would create a gross statistical anomaly like 9b. The anomaly stands out in even bolder relief when the unique instance in 9b is set beside over 200 demonstratives and articles that appear before the first alliteration in verses of types A3, B, and C.

When Dobbie accepts an emendation, he takes pains to show that it has been accepted by previous editors and highlights any non-metrical reasons to justify emendation. In discussing emendations to an unusual word in lines 368 and 2636 Dobbie is careful to observe that “Sievers, to whom credit is usually given, was anticipated by Heyne (2–4 ed.) and, in l. 368, by Ettmüller” (1953, 135). Neglect of metrical detail makes it easier for Dobbie to disagree with Sievers, as for example in the note to *Beowulf* 3027, *þenden hē wið wulf // wæl rēafode* “while with the wolf he plundered the slain.” Sievers suggested emending *wulf* to *wulfe* in the a-verse to create an acceptable instance of type A3. The evidence for this emendation “seems insufficient” to Dobbie (1953, 270), who argues that the manuscript verse would be acceptable as a rare instance of type B with alliteration on the second stress only. Scansion of this verse as type B presupposes that a pronoun before the first alliteration can bear metrical stress. Sievers did scan pronouns this way in verses he classified as type A3 to defend his hypothesis that every verse must have two stresses. There is no independent linguistic evidence to support that hypothesis, however. It has been abandoned by present-day researchers who accept most of Sievers’s claims and apply them routinely in their work (K4, 330). If *hē* is unstressed, as these neo-Sieversians believe, the verse is too short. Whether the verse scans as type B is actually beside the point. The relevant generalization is that an a-verse never has its only alliteration on its last syllable. This generalization is independent of metrical theory. It holds true in more than 1600 a-verses with single alliteration. That is probably why Sievers proposed to emend *Beowulf* 3027a rather than scanning it as type B, even though his scansion system allowed for that possibility.

Dobbie disregards a well-founded generalization that is perfectly consistent with the manuscript in his analysis of verse 445a, printed in K4 as *mægenhrēð manna* “glorious host of men.” In his note, Dobbie mentions Schröder’s claim that the second element of a compound never alliterates unless the first constituent alliterates also. Dobbie nevertheless decides to print the verse in his text as *mægen Hreðmanna* “the host of Hrethmen” because “it is tempting to find a tribal name in this line” (1953, 139). Schröder’s generalization is independent of metrical theory and holds true in more than a thousand noun and adjective

compounds employed by the *Beowulf* poet (cf. K4, cxii). The only exception mentioned by Dobbie is the one he proposes to create.

During work toward a PhD in English literature (1968–72), it was my curious fate to serve as the first teaching assistant for a new program in generative linguistics at Stony Brook. In my Old English seminars with Donald K. Fry, we studied volumes of the ASPR. In my seminars with Bea Hall and Frank Anshen, we studied generative phonology, generative syntax, and sociolinguistics. During this time, I met Paul Kiparsky, who had received his PhD in 1965 along with the first graduates from the generative linguistics program at MIT. We shared a strong interest in poetry and a conviction that linguistic theory had a role to play in explaining the intricate constraints observed by poets. In his work on iambic pentameter, Kiparsky provided explanations for many interesting facts that previous linguists and professors of literature had discovered. What I had to contribute, I thought, was to explain what researchers like Sievers and Dobbie had discovered. Most of my career has been devoted to that task. In its present form (Russom 2025), my generative theory of Old English meter is derived from a hypothesis that is simple in the relevant scientific sense of the term:

Initial hypothesis: Metrical constituents (positions, feet, verses, lines, etc.) are based on linguistic constituents (syllables, words, small phrases, sentences, etc.). Norms for a metrical constituent are based on norms for the corresponding linguistic constituent. Departure from metrical norms causes metrical complexity, restricting the frequency of a verse pattern. Each departure creates additional complexity.

This hypothesis is consistent with meters used by speakers of representative language types (Russom 2017). We will need to consider the following principles of Old English meter, which are derived from the initial hypothesis.

P1. The Old English verse contains two feet and each foot pattern corresponds to a word pattern. Every Old English word has a corresponding foot pattern, unstressed words and compound words included, except for compound words that fill a whole verse, which are interpreted as two feet. The normative foot corresponds to the normative Old English word, which has a trochaic strong-weak pattern (Dresher and Lahiri 1991).

P2. Metrical positions occupied by stressed syllables, called *lifts*, are arranged in a hierarchy of prominence. Within the metrical domains of foot, verse, and line, the first lift has the greatest prominence. These patterns of metrical prominence correspond to patterns of phrasal prominence at a time when the Germanic ancestor of English had subject-object-verb order (Russom 2022a). In such languages the first stressed constituent of a phrase, clause, or sentence has the most prominent stress.

P3. Alliteration is strongly associated with the linguistic prominence that is marked by stress in stress-based languages (Kiparsky 1973, 231). The most

prominent constituent in a verse normally alliterates. Alliteration is also associated with metrical prominence. Alliteration is obligatory on the first and most prominent lift of the verse. The first stressed constituent in the verse must alliterate on the first lift unless followed by a more prominent constituent on a lift within the same verse.

P4. Like alliteration, resolution is strongly associated with linguistic and metrical prominence (Dresher and Lahiri 1991). Resolution normally occurs in constituents with primary word stress and is obligatory when a resolvable constituent occupies the first and most prominent lift. Where alliteration is favored, resolution is also favored; where alliteration is unacceptable, resolution is rare or absent.

P5. Assignment of alliteration to a syllable acts like stress assignment in a language with subject-object-verb order, subordinating any following constituent in the metrical domain of the foot, verse, or line. Like linguistic subordination, this kind of metrical subordination makes the subordinated constituent less appropriate for alliteration and resolution.

P6. The extrametrical syllables in Old English poetry are extrametrical in the literal sense of the term and lie outside the metrical pattern proper. Although extrametrical syllables are not subject to constraints on metrical patterns, they are subject to constraints that prevent them from being confused with constituents in metrical patterns, such as light feet corresponding to unstressed words.

A hypothesis that holds true in a variety of poetic meters is not necessarily vague or permissive. Applied within Old English meter, the initial hypothesis excludes very specific verse structures. Manuscript verses like *þenden hē wið / wulf* have no normal scansion because Old English function words are unstressed monosyllables or disyllables (with a few apparent exceptions like compound function words, which count as two words). Since light unstressed feet must correspond to unstressed words by principle P1, we would not expect to find trisyllabic unstressed feet in Old English poetry. The manuscript verse scans as a stressed monosyllabic foot (*wulf*) preceded by a light disyllabic foot and two extrametrical syllables. It has five linguistic syllables but only three metrical positions, falling below the minimum requirement of four positions. The emendation (*þenden*) *hē wið / wulfe* scans as an acceptable verse because the inflectional ending on *wulfe* fills a fourth metrical position. Here and subsequently, extrametrical syllables are parenthesized and the boundary between feet is represented by a single slash (/).

Proposed emendations like those we have considered are vulnerable to attack by Dobbie because Sievers was not able to explain why his five types were the only acceptable ones. In an impressive number of instances Sievers was able to show that apparent exceptions to his typology were due to resolution or to use of

archaic forms from an era before contraction and epenthesis had occurred. Sievers's attempts to analyze more stubborn exceptions as subtypes of a common type were less persuasive, however (Russom 2022b). The basic problem was the absence of general principles that distinguished all acceptable verses from all unacceptable ones. When an unusual verse did not fit plausibly into one of the five types, there was no principled way to show that it was metrically defective. A generative approach to Old English meter does not suffer from this limitation because it predicts the relative frequencies of verse patterns rather than assigning observed patterns to categories justified by frequency of occurrence. I was delighted to discover that the predictions made by the generative theory were almost always consistent with judgments of acceptability by Sievers that had stood the test of time and were relied on by many researchers in their work. The generative theory is also consistent with some judgments by Sievers that are rejected by Dobbie. Let us see how general principles converge with Sievers's judgments in some of these difficult cases.

For generative scansion I use "S" to represent a metrical position that corresponds to a syllable with primary stress, "s" for a position corresponding to a syllable with subordinate stress, and "x" for a position corresponding to an unstressed syllable. The most common foot pattern, Sx, is based on the normative Old English word pattern, which is trochaic (Dresher and Lahiri 1991). The most common verse pattern, type A1, has two Sx feet. The most common pattern in Old English compounds is Ssx. Ssx compounds like *man-cynnes* "of mankind" (genitive singular) have a syllable with primary stress immediately followed by a syllable with subordinate stress, which is followed in turn by an unstressed inflectional syllable. Less common is the foot pattern Sxs, which corresponds to the pattern of compounds like *lēafnesword* "word of leave" and *hond-geweorc* "handiwork." These differ in two ways from the normative Ssx pattern, having an unstressed syllable between the stresses and no inflectional ending.

An Old English metrical foot is typically occupied by the corresponding word but may also be occupied by a word group, subject to important constraints. In a compound foot filled by a word group, primary word stress in the second stressed word of the group is an acceptable substitute for subordinate stress in the corresponding compound, but the stress pattern must otherwise be the same. Old English compounds with the pattern Sxxs normally have a trochaic primary constituent followed by prefixed secondary constituent. This is the pattern of genitive compounds like *sibbegedriht* "kindred band" and *entageweorc* "building made of cyclopean stone." The Sxxs pattern also occurs in quasi-compounds like *sāre gesceōd* "grievously injured" (*Beowulf* 2222b), where an adverb restricts the meaning of an immediately following verb and subordinates its stress, functioning in these respects like the first constituent of a noun or adjective compound (Campbell 1959, 36).

The Sxxs foot is particularly interesting because it has four metrical positions and resembles acceptable verse patterns in that respect. When an Sxxs foot is realized as a word group it may look to a modern editor like a verse with the pattern Sxx/S. Sievers rejects the Sxx/S pattern but has no principled way to rule it out. The manuscript verse *egsode eorl* (6a) has accordingly been interpreted as an Sxx/S verse by some textual critics, as Dobbie observes in his note. Dobbie supports emendation of 6a to *egsode / eorlas* (type A1), but on stylistic as well as metrical grounds, perhaps with the implication that the metrical evidence would be unreliable without support from a kind of stylistic evidence that editors are uniquely well qualified to provide. The manuscript verse *ræhte ongēan* (747b), another putative instance of Sxx/S, is immediately preceded by a smudged blank space, and Dobbie lists editorial emendations that restore unstressed words in this space to obtain a normal scansion. The K4 editors restore unstressed words in their text but Dobbie prints the manuscript verse without further discussion.

In his note to *Beowulf* 2150, where the only apparent problem is metrical, Dobbie accepts *lissa gelong* as a verse because it has four syllables and is therefore not too short according to his simplified metrical criteria. The generative theory rules out such verses with a general principle:

P7. When smaller metrical constituents must occur some fixed number of times within a larger metrical constituent, the audience must be able to enumerate the smaller constituents in real time as a poem is recited. To make this possible, the smaller constituents must be kept distinct from the larger constituents.

In an Old English verse with two feet, P7 predicts that a metrical pattern used as a foot will never be used as a verse. Consider the emendations for *ræhte ongēan* that restore one or more unstressed words in the smudged blank space before *ræhte*. These emendations create type B variants like *Beowulf* 808a, *on / fēonda geweald* “into the power of foes.” In the generative theory such type B variants are analyzed as two-foot verses consisting of a light foot based on an unstressed word and a heavy foot based on an Sxxs compound. Word groups like *fēonda geweald* provide a good match for Sxxs compounds like *sibbe-gedriht* or *enta-geweorc* because such word groups consist of a trochaic constituent followed by a prefixed monosyllable. In *Beowulf*, word groups like *fēonda geweald* and *lissa gelong* are preceded by unstressed words in 136 verses and by stressed words in 15 verses. Since Dobbie acknowledges the need to emend *egsode eorl* and the smudged blank space before *ræhte ongēan* makes its testimony unreliable, the only remaining exception is *lissa gelong*. There are thousands of lines in strict Old English meter to explore for comparable manuscript verses but the only one Dobbie cites is the second verse in *Guthlac* 312b–13a, *nis mē wiht at ēow // lēofes gelang* “nothing of what I love is dependent on you.”

In Russom (1987, 117–18), I pointed out that *Beowulf* 2149b–50a can be scanned as *gēn is / eall æt þē // liss ā ge- / long* “joy is absolutely always dependent on you,” where 2150a has an acceptable type E pattern. The meter and syntax are similar in *Paris Psalter* 61.1, *æt him is / hǣlu mīn // hēr eall ge- / lancg* “my prosperity here is absolutely dependent on him.” I cannot fault Dobbie’s decision to refrain from emending 2150a but the manuscript verse is not inconsistent with Sievers’s typology. There is not a reliably attested parallel to *lēofes gelang* in *Beowulf*.

The *Beowulf* poet employs a formulaic diction that antedates the split between North and West Germanic poetry (K4, cxi–cxvii). *Beowulf* would have sounded archaic when it was first performed. Linguistic evidence indicates that the poem was composed around 700 CE and codicological evidence indicates that the manuscript was written down about three hundred years later. There are no other manuscripts of *Beowulf* but we would expect to find some instances of modernization that are detectable because they cause metrical problems. Consider the problem that arises in 3056a, *hē is manna gehyld* “he is the protection of men,” where *-hyld* alliterates with *hord* in the b-verse. In his note to line 3056 Dobbie represents this as “one of the few B-type half-lines with alliteration on the second stress.” Representing 3056a as an instance of type B confines attention arbitrarily to a single type and obscures a gross statistical anomaly within the poem as a whole. The relevant generalization is that the first stressed word in a verse alliterates if it is a lexical noun or adjective (as distinct from a pronoun or a demonstrative adjective). This generalization is theory-independent and holds true with extremely rare exceptions, not only in *Beowulf* but throughout early Germanic poetry in traditional meter. The handful of defensible exceptions involve predicate nominatives or adjectives, which appear to have undergone stress subordination at clause level when placed before the finite verb. There is one example of this kind in *Beowulf*: *mǣl is mē tō / fēran* “it is time for me to go” (315a), which alliterates on *f*-. The concordance for the poems of the ASPR (Bessinger 1978) lists 147 verses that include genitive plural *manna*, which occupies the first lift in 129 verses, with alliteration in 125 instances. Apart from *Beowulf* 3056a, non-alliterating *manna* occurs only in three verses from *The Paris Psalter*, which is well known to be metrically irregular. All three exceptions occur in lines with no alliteration at all. The manuscript verse *hē is manna gehyld* is grossly anomalous. Non-alliterating *man* in *Beowulf* 1175a is not comparable to non-alliterating *manna* because, as the entry in the K4 glossary points out, *man* is used in that instance as a weakly stressed indefinite pronoun meaning “one, a person” rather than as a lexical noun. This usage occurs only in nominative singular forms, not in plural forms like *manna*. Krapp and Dobbie print all 147 verses with *manna* but seem curiously uninterested in the distribution of this manuscript form.

The only other exception like 3056a is in line 2615, *brūnfāgne helm, // hringde byrnan* “a bright-colored helmet (and) a mailcoat made of rings.” If the b-verse is regular, the non-alliterating adjective in the a-verse is grossly anomalous; if the a-verse is regular, the same gross anomaly occurs in the b-verse. As Dobbie observes, several editors have suggested emending 3056a to *hē is gehyld manna* (type C) and 2615b to *byrnan hringde* (type A1). In both instances the emendation posits a change from archaic word order in the original to modern word order in the manuscript. The manuscript verses are likely examples of scribal modernization. In rejecting the proposed emendations, Dobbie is not defending the manuscript against airy speculation. The evidence for these emendations is empirical and the basic assumption is that the distribution of verse patterns in the manuscript provides a largely accurate representation of the meter.

The generative theory also converges with discoveries about short stressed syllables by present-day Sieversians. With very few exceptions, *Beowulf* conforms to Fulk’s rule of the coda, which forbids resolution of a subordinate constituent in a verse-final Ssx compound (Fulk 1992, 201). There are similarly few exceptions to Terasawa’s rule, which forbids resolution of a subordinate constituent in Sxs compounds, which are always in verse-final position (Terasawa 1994). Both rules converge with the principles of subordination in P2–P5, which predict that resolution will be inhibited in syllables that are subordinated metrically as well as linguistically. From the perspective of the generative theory, what Terasawa’s rule and the rule of the coda do is to rule out resolution of syllables that are linguistically subordinated in compounds and occupy subordinate s positions in verse-final compound feet. This constraint may have been overlooked by Sievers because he represents the second lift in types B and C as a primary lift rather than as a subordinate lift, obscuring the role of metrical subordination (Russom 2022b).

There are three putative violations of Terasawa’s rule in the K4 text of *Beowulf*: *wīggetawum* (368a), *gūðgetawum* (395b), and *wundorbebodum* (1747a). All three are problematic. Dobbie rejects Sievers’s emendation of *wīggetawum* to *wīggeatwum* and Holthausen’s emendation of *gūðgetawum* to *gūðsearwum*. The emended compounds have the pattern Ssx, avoiding violation of Terasawa’s rule and conforming to Fulk’s rule of the coda. The generalizations discovered by Fulk and Terasawa explain why two early textual critics immersed in manuscript detail replaced the Sxs compounds with Ssx compounds. In his note to 368a Dobbie cites Pope’s evidence for a short *a* with subordinate stress in *wīggetawum* and concludes that there is no objection to the manuscript verse. Dobbie’s argument presupposes that *-tawum* would be resolvable under subordinate stress but he says nothing explicitly, as usual in situations where vowel length is relevant. Since Dobbie finds no problem with *-tawum* in 368a, he allows that the

scribe might have intended *-tawum* in 395b but prints his reading of the manuscript verse in the text. There is no metrical discussion of *wundorbebodum* in Dobbie's note to line 1747, where normal scansion requires resolution of *-bodum* but such resolution is not reliably attested, as Terasawa showed. Terasawa's rule is a theory-independent generalization that holds true 109 times in *Beowulf*. The only possible exceptions are 368a, 395b, and 1747a. It seems reasonable to look for an unsuspected factor that might be at work in these anomalies. The most salient clue is the unstressed internal prefix.

In early West Norse the number of unstressed prefixes gradually declined. Semantic distinctions between prefixes were blurred and more common prefixes replaced less common ones (Kuhn 1929). This process continued until only two prefixes remained, *of-* and *um-*. Old Norse alliterative poets used these last remnants to fill a required metrical position in traditional formulas that originally had a variety of unstressed Germanic prefixes. The remnants were then lost from the language. The most common unstressed prefix lost its syllabic status and survived only as initial *g-* in some words like *glīkr*, the Old Norse cognate of Old English *ge-līc*, which has the most common Old English prefix. Germanic prefixes have also been lost in English but the process has been slower. The *ge-* prefix survived into Early Modern English as the *y-* in words like *yclept*. During the era of *Beowulf* the old prefixes were still used but many words could appear with or without them. It seems reasonable to suppose that scribes would sometimes substitute one variant for another. Without prefixes, the apparent violations of Terasawa's rule become *wīgtawum*, *gūðtawum*, and *wundorbodum*. If we assume that *wundor* reflects the well-attested poetic archaism *wundr-*, with non-syllabic *r*, all three of these forms scan as Ssx without resolution, in accord with Fulk's rule of the coda. The anomalous compounds appear only in *Beowulf* and only once each. In all three instances the primary constituent could be removed without any damage to sense or grammar and provides the required alliteration. Compounds with redundant first constituents are extremely common in poems like *Beowulf* and extremely rare in prose. They were created by poets for use in poetry. It seems unreasonable to suppose that a poet with two forms to choose from would create a poetic compound with the metrically anomalous one. Variation between prefixed and non-prefixal forms in *Beowulf* is shown very clearly indeed by *pegn / nytte behēold* "the thane performed his function" (494b) and *sceft / nytte hēold* "the arrow-shaft performed its function" (3118b).

The *Beowulf* poet seems to avoid verse-final resolution in Sxs word groups as well as Sxs compounds. This tendency shows up most conspicuously in the distribution of words with prefixed and non-prefixal variants that can substitute for one another—as with *hēold* and *behēold*—but have a stressed syllable that is short rather than long. According to the K4 glossary, the primary meaning for both *beran* and *æt-beran* is "bear, carry." In 1561b, *æt- / beran meahte* "might

bear,” the prefix is required to fill a fourth metrical position and *beran* is resolved on the first and most prominent lift of the verse. In eleven type C verses like *him wæs / ful boren* “a cup was borne to him” (1192a), non-prefixal *beran* stands unresolved in final position (cf. 48b, 291b, 296b, 437a, 1024a, 1647b, 1920a, 2055b, 2152a, and 2518b). There are no type B instances like *him wæs / ful ætboren*. The resolvable prefixed form is used only to avoid an unacceptable verse with three metrical positions. The dispreferred word group *ful ætboren* corresponds to the manuscript compounds *wīggetawum*, *gūðgetawum*, and *wundorbebodum*, in which resolution of the second stress violates Terasawa’s rule. The preferred word group *ful boren* corresponds to the emended compounds *wīgtawum*, *gūðtawum*, and *wundorbodum*, in which the second stress stands unresolved as required by the rule of the coda.

Several other words in *Beowulf* have prefixed and non-prefixal forms that can be substituted for one another. Many occur in type C verses like *æt- / beran meahte*.

With prefixed form resolved on the first lift in type C: *tō- / brecan meahte* “to break up” 780b, *tō- / brocen swīðe* “very broken up” 997b, *ge- / brocen hæfde* “had broken” 3147b; *ge- / faran wolde* “would fare” 738b; *be- / foran gengde* “went before” 1412b, *be- / foran wolde* “would (go) before” 2497b; *on- / geador spræcon* “spoke together” 1595b; *ā- / gifan þenceð* “thinks to give” 355b; *ge- / numen hæfdon* “had taken” 3165b; *nē ge- / sacu ðhwær* “nor strife anywhere” 1737b, *on- / sacan mihte* “might fight” 2954b; *ge- / witan meahton* “could discern” 1350b; *for- / wrecan meahte* “might drive away” 1919b.

The prefix is required for normal scansion in every instance except *nē ge- / sacu ðhwær*, which has *nē* available to fill the fourth metrical position.

The prefixed forms are in near-perfect complementary distribution with non-prefixal forms on the first and most prominent lift of the verse. These include additional instances with *beran* in types A and D.

With non-prefixal form resolved on first lift: *beran ofer / bolcan* “to bear over the gangway” 231a, *byreð / blōdig wæl* “bears the bloody corpse” 448a; *brecan of / beorge* “to break out of the barrow” 2546a; *faran / flotherge* “to journey in a naval force” 2915a; *foran æghwylc / wæs* “was before each” 984b; *geador æt- / somne* “gathered together” 491b; *gyfen / goldhroden* “given decked with gold” 1948a; *nymeð / nýdbāde* “takes forced tribute” 598a; *ond / sacu restan* “and strife (shall) cease” 1857b.

A prefixed form is unnecessary in these verses and would cause unnecessary anacrusis in most of them. The prefixed instance *nē ge- / sacu ðhwær* would belong here with *ond / sacu restan* if the unnecessary prefix were removed.

Prefixed *gesacu* scans normally in Sievers's system but goes contrary to an otherwise consistent technique of composition. An editor who emended to *nē / sacu ōhwær* would be doing so for what Dobbie might call "stylistic reasons."

Unstressed syllables are normally resolved on S positions. Most exceptions are on the second S position in type A2k (Ss/Sx). Non-prefixal forms of *beran*, *gifan*, and *witan* fill the second foot without resolution in several instances of this type.

Non-prefixal form unresolved in second foot of type A2k: *Hrunting / beran* "to bear Hrunting (a sword)" 1807b, *gārholt / bere* "to bear a spear" 1834b, *hringnet / beran* "to bear a shirt of mail" 2754b, *æpeling / boren* "the lord (was) borne" 3135b; *herespēd / gyfen* "success in war (was) given" 64b, *ondslyht / giofan* "to give a stroke" 2972b; *frumcyn / witan* "to know the kindred of origin" 252a.

As Sievers observed, non-resolution is permissible in the second foot of type A2k only when the short stressed syllable is immediately preceded by the stressed syllable on the s position of the first foot. The prefixed alternatives would violate this constraint if substituted for the non-prefixal ones.

The most common placement for non-prefixal forms is on the sx sequence of a verse-final Ssx foot, as with *beran*. Most examples are in type C.

Non-prefixal form with unresolved short syllable on the s position in type C: *tō / hām faran* "to go home" 124b, *on ge- / flit faran* "to go in flight" 865a, *on / lāst faran* "to go on the track" 2945b; *þæt wæs / ān foran* "that was uniquely superior" 1458a; *on / hand gyfen* "given in hand" 1678b; *sē þe hine / dēað nimeð* "whom death takes" 441b; *gif mec / dēað nimeð* "if death takes me" 447b, *gif mec / hild nime* "if warfare should take me" 452b, *ond sēo / cwēn numen* "and the queen (was) taken" 1153b, *gif mec / hild nime* "if battle should take me" 1481b, *opðe mec / dēað nimeð* "or death takes me" 1491b, *heht his / sweord niman* "said to take his sword" 1808b, *þæt ðe / gār nymeð* "that a spear takes" 1846b, *oððe / gūð nimeð* "or war takes" 2536b, *lēton / wēg niman* "they let the wave take" 3132b; *ond ymb / feorh sacan* "and fight for life" 439b; *ge- / scād witan* "to understand discernment" 288b, *þæt þone / grund wite* "that knows the bottom" 1367; *on / bid wreccen* "driven to a standstill, brought to bay" 2962b.

In these examples the Ssx word groups correspond to Ssx compounds that obey Fulk's rule of the coda. *Beowulf* 2551b, *word / ūt faran* "for a word to go out," provides one additional example with the short syllable unresolved in Sievers's type D2 (S/Ssx).

The generative theory distinguishes the second stress in Sxs and Ssx compounds from the second stress in the corresponding word groups. Since there is no additional effect from word-level linguistic subordination in the word groups, the theory predicts that the constituent on the s position will have somewhat greater prominence. The constraint on resolution of subordinate

compound constituents imposed by P5 should accordingly be somewhat weaker in the corresponding word groups. A violation of this weaker constraint does occur in 2472a, *þā wæs / synn ond sacu* “then there was hostility and fighting.” Though metrically unusual, this instance conforms to the poet’s stylistic practice of employing prefixed forms only when they perform a required metrical function. In 2472a the unprefixed form provides the required syllable for an Sxs foot in type B and the prefixed form would create an Sxxs foot that departs farther from the trochaic norm. Resolution of the second stress in an Sxs word group appears to be an acceptable departure from the norm, as shown by a small but significant number of verses for which no alternative prefixed or unprefixed form is available (128b, 294a, 800a, 853a, 1360a, 1484a, 2367a, 2397a, 2472a, 2685a, and 2808a). The distribution of these examples testifies to their authenticity. Only one of them occurs in the b-verse, where the s position has undergone subordination within the line as well as the verse. All the other examples occur in the a-verse, where there is no added effect from subordination within the line. General principles at a high level of abstraction make concrete predictions about placement of short syllables within Old English feet, verses, and lines.

Fulk distinguishes contraction of constituents with short stressed vowels from contraction of those with long stressed vowels. In arguing for a short stressed vowel in pre-contract forms of *dôn* and *gân*, he observes that “the distribution of unambiguous verses in *Beowulf* forms a remarkable pattern” (Fulk 1992, 107). The contracted syllables in *gedôn* and *gegân* always appear on the first lift of a type C verse. With one exception, the non-prefixal forms appear as the second stressed constituent in type C. Verses like *hāt / in gân* are clearly acceptable but verses like **gân / wolde* are not. These verse patterns are both short of one syllable if scanned according to the manuscript but the poet distinguishes systematically between them. Fulk used the complementary distribution of forms to show that *dôn* and *gân* were originally resolvable disyllabic constituents with short stressed vowels. The same evidence shows that the generalized version of Terasawa’s rule applies to contract forms in word groups.

Similar to *æt- / beran meahte*, with a prefixed contract form on the first lift in type C: *ge- / dôn wolde* “would put” 2090b, 2186b; *ge- / gân wolde* “would go” 1277b, 2090b; *ge- / gân dorste* “durst go” 1462b, *ge- / gân þenceð* “thinks to go” 1535b, *ge- / gân hæfdon* “had gone” 2630b.

Similar to *tō / hām faran*, with a non-prefixal contract form on the subordinate lift in type C: *swā hē nū / gēn dêð* “as he still does” 2859b, *swā hē nū / gīt dêð* “as he yet does” 1058b, *swā nū / gýt dêð* 1134b, *ond on / bæł dôn* “and place on the pyre” 1116b, *swā sceal / man dôn* “so shall one do” 1172b, 1534b; *hāt / in gân* “say to go in” 386b, *ðā cōm / in gân* “then came walk(ing) in” 1644a, *on / flett gâð* “walks onto the hall floor” 2034b, 2054b.

Similar to *foran æghwylc / wæs*, with a non-prefixal contract form on the first lift in type E: *gêþ eft sē / (þe) mōt* “he who can do so goes” 603b.

The distribution of contract forms corresponds very closely indeed to the distribution of resolvable constituents. All the prefixed instances have the contract form on the first and most prominent lift of a type C verse. This is the most common placement for a resolvable constituent in a prefixed form. Of the eleven contract forms without prefixes, ten fill the last two positions in a verse-final Ssx foot when decontracted. These are the positions most often filled by unresolved syllables in the corresponding non-prefixal forms with resolvable constituents. The absence of verses like **him wæs / ful ætboren* is paralleled by the absence of verses like **on / flett gegêð*. Prefixed contract forms are used only when the corresponding unprefixed form would cause metrical problems, resembling prefixed resolvable forms in this respect as well. In every example, the prefix on a contract form is required to fill a fourth metrical position. Substitution of the prefixed form for *gêþ* in 603b, a type E verse, would create anacrusis, which is otherwise unattested in type E.

We have observed that optional prefixes on resolvable constituents are used by the poet primarily, perhaps always, when the verse would have only three positions otherwise. An optional prefix on a non-resolvable constituent can perform the same metrical function. Consider *Beowulf* 1083b, *wiht gefeohtan* “to fight at all.” As the K4 editors observe, *gefeohtan* does not have its usual meaning in this instance and may simply mean “fight,” as Klaeber suggested, or “fight out,” as Malone suggested. The poet uses the *ge-* prefix here to fill the fourth metrical position against prevailing usage, employing an unusual sense “fight out” or adding the prefix artificially to *feohtan* “fight” (cf. *Finnsburh* 41a). Now consider the compound forms *unigmetes* (1792b) and *ungemete*, with prefixal *ge-* as the second syllable (2420, 2721, 2728). Fulk (1992, 70–71) observes that of thirty-seven verses in the poetic corpus containing forms of *ungemet / unigmet*, nearly all are metrically anomalous and would be regularized by substitution of non-prefixal *unmet*. Substitution of *unmet* would also be acceptable in the verses that scan normally. The non-prefixal alternative is rare in Old English prose but survives in cognate Germanic poetry. Goering (2021) provides detailed discussion of Old Saxon *unmet* and Old High German *unmez*. The rare archaic form without an internal prefix was evidently used for metrical reasons by Old English poets and then modernized by scribes who were not familiar with it.

Editors can contribute to metrical theory if they function like the experimentalists who test claims in theoretical physics. Experimental physicists do not represent themselves as defenders of common sense against airy theorizing—the attitude currently known as science denial. That sort of conservative posture is an ill-concealed demand for unquestionable authority. As

Fulk (2022) shows, Krapp and Dobbie simplified the rules of Old English meter in part because their understanding of Sievers's system was rather limited. They were not experts on verse form. Dobbie's neglect of metrical detail disguises the empirical evidence for Sievers's judgments, which can be much weightier than generally supposed and should not be particularly difficult to understand. An editor who objects to an emendation based on a metrical rule should know—and acknowledge—how often that rule holds true, approximately if not exactly. Metrical theorists can be helpful to editors by presenting the statistical evidence for their claims in a clear and accessible way. If a rule violation is a gross statistical anomaly the editor has no obvious basis for objection and is in no position to declare the verse well formed.

Conservatives of quite a different kind admire the arts and crafts of pre-industrial cultures and do not regard newness as a *sine qua non*. Conservators devote much talent and scientific ingenuity to restoring museum pieces, using as much of the original material as possible. The results may not be exactly like the originals but inconspicuous repairs clarify the artistic design and remove obstacles to appreciation by the people who attend the museum. The editor of an Old English poem can clarify its metrical design in small ways that risk no damage to the manuscript, which can be left in the care of conservators, made widely available in digital form, and analyzed by codicological experts. The design of *Beowulf* is manifested in the distribution of type A1 manuscript verses, which express the verse norm with high frequency at regular intervals, and in the distributions of manuscript verses that depart from metrical norms within strict limits at appropriate frequencies (Russom 2009). The record of this illustrious poetic endeavor is the manuscript as a whole and the vast majority of manuscript verses adhere to a coherent artistic plan. Printing *mægen Hreðmanna* was a willful disfigurement of the work. For a few gross statistical anomalies emendation on metrical grounds seems perfectly appropriate. We have explored one element of metrical design in detail, a prominence hierarchy that establishes strong-weak patterns at all levels of metrical structure. Strong constituents of the pattern are highlighted by alliteration, which enhances metrical prominence, and by resolution, which adds syllabic weight to prominent metrical positions. Sievers is a reliable guide to employment of short vowels on the most prominent positions. Fulk and Terasawa are reliable guides to placement of short vowels on the least prominent positions. Discoveries by Sievers and the neo-Sieversians provide a sound basis for further study of a remarkable poetic form.

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