Leeds Studies in English

The Three Tellings of Beowulf's Fight with Grendel's Mother

Rosemary Huisman

Beowulf offers three descriptions of Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother. The
first is by the narrator (ll. 1492–1590), the second is by Beowulf to Hrothgar
(ll. 1652–76), the third is by Beowulf to Hygelac (included in ll. 2131–51, within
the longer speech from l. 2047). Early (structuralist) studies of narration in English
typically used the word 'story' to describe the sequence of events involving
characters which could be abstracted from any specific telling (such as the story of
Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother). The term 'discourse' was then
contrastively used to describe the specific telling in the medium language of that
story. In that terminology, here in Beowulf we have three discourses of the one
story.[1] In 1955, Leslie Rogers published an article in the *Review of English
Studies* entitled 'Beowulf's Three Great Fights'.[2] This paper, 'The Three Tellings
of Beowulf's Fight with Grendel's Mother', is intended to echo that earlier paper, as
befits a student of a teacher, but also to demonstrate one of the developments in
literary discussion over the thirty odd years since that earlier article was published:
the concern with discourse rather than story.

   The trouble with a simple story/discourse opposition is that, if one equates
story and subject-matter, or if one paraphrases story as 'what the discourse is
about', then it is obvious that the three passages from Beowulf are not simply 'about
the same event'. In the first passage, the narrator tells the reader/listener about
Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother, whereas in the second and third tellings the
narrator tells about Beowulf telling about his fight with Grendel's mother. The
second and third passages again differ in that the narrator tells of Beowulf's telling
to different audiences, first to Hrothgar of the Danes, later to Hygelac, his own lord,
of the Geats. These three tellings illuminate two points, a practical one and a more
general, theoretical one. The practical point, which will be the concern of this
paper, is that dealing with these three accounts allows us to relate differences in the
telling to differences in the social positioning of tellers and audience. This

approximates to what in studies of narration is sometimes called 'point of view'.[3] The degree of coherence we can read into these differing points of view allows us to speculate on the extent to which we can reconstruct, hypothetically, the world-view (ideology) within which the discourses of *Beowulf* are constructed (technically, which is instantiated and realized in the text).[4] The general point is that these three discourses, two of which are explicit tellings, by a character to characters, remind us that all stories are 'told' (or whatever verb is appropriate to the medium), constructed with a particular ideological bias that is located in a socially constructed view of events and people's roles in them which in turn are endorsed and reinforced in the telling.[5]

To examine the relationship of the semantic structure of the text to the social structure in which it is produced, it is necessary to make a detailed analysis of the language of the three tellings in the context of a linguistic theory which relates language choice and the social context of that language use. The theory of language as social semiotic, expounded by M. A. K. Halliday, using a functional grammar within a systemic model of language, is, I believe, most suitable for this purpose. (For those unfamiliar with Halliday's work, a summary description is given in Appendix B.) The essence of the approach in this paper is that it cannot be done on paraphrase, on a summary of the story or other such convenient reduction of the discourse. (So that each discourse can be referred to, the three tellings are given in full in Appendix A.[6]) The meaning is in the telling, and there is no traditional division between what is 'content' and what is 'style'. On the other hand, this study is not an interpretation of the poem; it does not offer one comprehensive reading. Rather, it observes the meaning choices made in the text from the semantic resources (the systems) of the language. The commentary is not exhaustive; for the most part it is limited to the choices which are realized in the grammatical clause. In particular, it is informative to look closely at the choices from the system of Transitivity in the clause, choices displaying, for example, who does what to whom in what circumstances.

The narrative point of view in this telling does not remain constant. Sometimes it is that of an omniscient narrator with a panoramic view of historical events. Thus in lines 1525b–28, the narrator tells a brief history of Beowulf's sword Hrunting, elevating the difficulty of Beowulf's endeavour in this story in relation to numerous past encounters ('that was the first time its glory failed'). Sometimes the narrator is external to the characters, telling the story primarily through the externally observable material processes, as in lines 1501–12. Frequently, the narrator is internal to a character, telling the story as a projection of

the perception, the mental processes, of one or other of the characters. This can be seen in lines 1495b–1500. *Ongytan* (l. 1496) and *onfunde* (l. 1497) clearly balance the perceptions of the two participants, and, while *beheold* (l. 1498) and *cunnode* (l. 1500) can be glossed as material processes (Klaeber suggests 'guarded' and 'explored' respectively), both words emerge from a lexical base of mental processes. The juxtaposition of narrative positions is intricate: in *ælwihta eard*, 'homeland of monsters' (l. 1500), *eard* could tell the monster's story (that is, the monster could tell such a story), but the lexical item *ælwihta*, literally 'other creatures', constructs the monsters from Beowulf's point of view. Equally, as in *selegyst* , 'hall-guest' (l. 1545), it can be Beowulf who is constructed as alien, the monster's viewpoint, in the lexical choice.

Through this modulating narrative voice, the first telling primarily endorses two inter-related social constructions: the first is that of the nature of the hero, the second that of the relationship between heroic action and a Christian world-view. The second construction is textually realized in the latter part of the telling, from line 1545, and builds on the (by then) contextually established meanings on the nature of the hero. A detailed discussion of the first telling follows.

In lines 1492–94a, the antithetical material processes, 'hasten' and 'wait', allow the narrator both to vary the telling of the one heroic action (the typical Old English rhetorical device usually called variation) through the change of interpersonal meaning ('wait' told with negative polarity and marked modality of inclination) and to add circumstantial meaning to each process. 'Haste' is motivated, or at least associated, with 'courage', so in context could be described as 'heroic action' and the Actor (semantic role) participant associated with this process, 'a hero'. Contrasted with 'hastening with courage' is 'waiting for an answer': the hero does not postpone necessary action with unnecessary words.[7] The hero participant has not been identified as an individual by name but by his social role, *Weder-Geata leod*, 'prince of the Weder-Geats'.

The next clause, *brim wylm onfeng | hilderince*, 'a surge of the water took (or received) the warrior' (ll. 1494–95), names Beowulf a *hilderinc,* 'battle warrior', but intimates that he is entering a realm in which his normal role of the 'man of action' is at risk. Here nature is the Actor in relation to the material process *onfeng.*[8] In fact, until line 1537, Beowulf will barely function as a grammatical Actor or Agent in the clauses of the text. First, in lines 1495b-1500, the story is told through the mental processes, the perceptions, of the characters (*ongytan,* l. 1496; *onfunde,* l. 1497; *beheold,* l. 1498; *cunnode,* l. 1500, as discussed previously). The semantic role of Actor is not associated with a mental process.

Then, in lines 1501–12a, the story is told, primarily, directly by the narrator in material/action processes: *grap, gefeng* (l. 1501), *ymbbearh* (l. 1503), *bær* (l. 1506), *gewealdan* (l. 1509), *swencte* (l. 1510), *bræc* (l. 1511), *ehton* (l. 1512). The world of action is surely that of the hero's sphere, and lexically Beowulf is appropriately named: he is a *guðrinc*, 'battle-warrior' (l. 1501). However, Beowulf's grammatical roles are here most unheroic. He is the Goal of those action processes which are transitive, not the Actor. Not only do Grendel's mother and other monsters attack him, in addition his armour protects him. Though both Grendel's mother and Beowulf are described as 'unable', in terms of *ne mihte* (ll. 1504, 1508), Grendel's mother cannot overcome the strength of the armour with her acts of hostility, whereas Beowulf cannot even initiate acts of hostility. And this profound inability is placed in the context of *no he þæs modig wæs*, 'no matter how brave he was' (l. 1508b). In such situations, the heroic code has no positive solution to offer.[9] What now?

In lines 1512b–19, the action is again suspended. We return to the hero's mental processes in *ongeat*, 'perceived' (l. 1512), to Beowulf's point of view. He realizes he is in a *niðsele*, a 'hostile (to him) hall', the antithesis of Hrothgar's hall, Heorot. So transparently do we accept Beowulf's attitude, that the apparent contradiction in the narrator's information (in negative constructions, we are told that the hall *protects* Beowulf from the water) is not, I think, usually read as incoherent.[10] The process of the next independent clause is again a mental process: *Fyrleoht geseah*, 'he saw firelight'. (In similar tales, such as the Old Norse *Grettis saga*, there is a fire in the monster's cave behind the waterfall.[11] Light also follows the central battle, line 1570, and then appears to be associated with divine intervention.) By this fire-light, in a third mental process (*ongeat*, l. 1518), Beowulf perceives the monster. The narrative may be in the third person, but the position of subjectivity constructed by the reader/listener is in Beowulf's mind.[12]

At last, in lines 1519–20, Beowulf is a grammatical Actor and performs an heroic action: he has the Actor/Agent role in relation to two processes, *forgeaf*, 'gave' and *ofteah,* 'withheld', in clauses which describe the one event. Like the pair *efste/bidan* (1493/94), these two processes are antithetical in experiential meaning, with the interpersonal meaning of negative polarity (*ne ofteah*) realized in the second clause. The dichotomy of heroic/unheroic choice in a situation is explicitly given through the device of variation: Beowulf chooses the heroic action, Beowulf does not choose the unheroic action. But to no avail. The sword, given the circumstantial role of Means, *hildebille*, 'with the battle-sword' (l. 1520), in the narrator's direct telling of Beowulf's action in lines 1518–20, becomes, in the next

clause complex, part of the projection (the paratactically linked clauses following *þæt*, l. 1523) of another mental process by Beowulf (*onfand*, l. 1522). He perceives that the sword fails. Yet the narrator has given Beowulf's perception from a view external to Beowulf in naming him *se gist,* 'the stranger' (l. 1522). This external view is swiftly expanded to an historical perspective in lines 1525–28, where Beowulf's perception of failure in this heroic action is placed in the context of the sword's success in numerous past heroic actions. Ultimate success in this encounter will be all the more highly valued, for an encounter acquires its heroic value in the context of a world of other, known, heroic actions. Certainly a *scop*, whose social function it is to ensure this public renown, has a vested interest in endorsing such evaluation. The context of the heroic world is essentially a verbal context of 'tellings', of heroic stories.

However, even if Beowulf cannot *act* like a hero, he can have the mental attitude of a hero, told in a relational process with associated attributes in lines 1529–30. The description *wæs . . . nalas elnes læt* lexically recalls the initial heroic action, *efste mid elne* (l. 1493). Like the process pairs *efste/bidan* (ll. 1493/94) and *forgeaf/ofteah* (ll. 1519/20), the attributes *anræd*, 'resolute', and *elnes læt*, 'slack in courage', are lexically antithetical, but can be used in variation, with negative polarity of the second item, to make explicit the dichotomy of heroic/unheroic choice.

Because he has the mental attitude of a hero, Beowulf can still be given the lexical description *yrre oretta*, 'angry champion' (l. 1532), though so far in this encounter he has scarcely functioned as a grammatical hero: one who is Actor/Agent in association with successful (positive polarity) action processes. As a first heroic step, he can function as Actor/Agent in relation to the material process *wearp*, 'threw down' (l. 1531). Beowulf discards the useless instrument and puts faith in himself alone (*getruwode*, l. 1533, a mental process). The narrator then insists we recognize Beowulf's action as one of a class of acts, in the gnomic pronouncement of lines 1534b–36. The tense is present, the subject impersonal, the verb *don* the most general lexical item for an action process. And the social context for this general class of action is a mental attitude, expressed, yet again, in two processes, one with positive, one with negative polarity (*þenceð*, l. 1535 and *ceareð*, l. 1536). The heroic ideology endorsed by the poem *Beowulf* is explicitly told in these lines. First an 'heroic mental attitude' precedes the heroic action and secondly, again, the heroic/unheroic attitude is represented as a simple dichotomy, 'think to gain long-lasting praise in battle' *versus* 'care about one's own life'. The reader can construct a similar stance from Beowulf's words to Hrothgar (ll. 1386–89):

Ure æghwylc sceal   ende gebidan
worolde lifes;   wyrce se þe mote
domes ær deaþe;   þæt biδ drihtguman
unlifgendum   æfter selest.

Each of us must await the end of life in this world; let him who
can, achieve glory before death; afterwards, when lifeless, that
will be best for a noble man.

Lof, 'praise' (l. 1536), will be echoed in the final judgment of Beowulf in the closing lines of the poem, in the superlative *lofgeornost*, 'most eager for renown' (l. 3182). Ultimately the reader/listener is told to judge Beowulf not on his heroic actions but on his most consistent choice of the heroic attitude.

Yet, again, in lines 1537–40, Beowulf functions grammatically as a hero ought, with the Actor/Agent semantic roles in relation to the processes *gefeng* (l. 1537) and *brægd* (l. 1539). *Gefeng* and *brægd* are given phonic and grammatical prominence. Each participates in the alliterative pattern of its line and so is relatively stressed. In parallel thematic structure, each is in initial position in its clause, that is, each clause has marked Theme. The meaning of thematic position here is that the narrator's message is about Beowulf's actions, rather than, for example, about Beowulf himself. The construction of his appropriate mental state continues: not only is Beowulf resolute (l. 1529) and angry (l. 1532), he also does not 'mourn' on account of the feud (l. 1537b), and he is 'swollen' with rage (l. 1539). The sense of *murnan* (infinitive of *mearn*, l. 1537) in Beowulf deserves comment. Its general sense in the poem appears to be that of a mental state of sadness, though more specialized translations are usually given in different contexts ('remorse', 'regret', and so on). Whatever the Modern English translation of *murnan* here, I take the sense to be contextually the same as in lines 1384–85: *Selre biδ æghwæm, | þæt he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne*, 'It is better for anyone that he should avenge his friend, rather than mourn greatly.' These lines immediately precede Beowulf's general remarks on death and glory, already quoted above. This comparative construction can be understood as: 'a person should *wrecan* as well as *murnan*', but it could also be read as a choice: 'a person can *wrecan* or *murnan*', that is, the heroic act is to avenge *versus* the unheroic act is to mourn. The latter type of interpretation I have given to the antithetical pairs already discussed, such as *efste/bidan* (ll. 1493/94), and in line 1537 *mearn* is in such a

context: two antithetical mental processes, *gefeng* and *mearn*, used of the same heroic event, with negative polarity associated with the second process. The monsters can also choose vengeance rather than mourning, but the text overcomes this apparent assigning of heroic deeds to the monsters by lexically associating them with words of negative judgment (as in ll. 1255/56, *þætte wrecend* with *laþum*). As with *yrre oretta* (l. 1533), the lexical choices in the text promote specific judgments on the characters and their role in the narrative ('the hero', 'the villain') at the risk of textual incongruity.

Moreover, in lines 1537–40, for the first time in the textual encounter, Grendel's mother is the Goal of a material process (*Grendles modor*, of *gefeng*) or occupies the Medium semantic role (*Grendles modor*, and also *heo* in relation to *gebeah*). The latter role is short-lived, as *hraþe*, 'quickly', in line 1541 tells. In this line, the Agent role for *heo* and Beneficiary/Recipient for *him*[13] are immediately juxtaposed, with the alliteration falling on the adverb *eft*, 'again'. A reader will typically construct a meaning in which the reversal of events is given prominence. Line 1542, which completes the clause complex begun in the previous line, ends with Grendel's mother now having the Actor role in relation to the verb *feng* — a reversal from line 1537, which began with the same lexical verb stem, *gefeng*, associated with Beowulf as Actor. By line 1543, Beowulf is Medium in relation to *oferwearp*, 'stumbled', which lexically recalls his earlier disposal of Hrunting (*wearp*, 'threw down', l. 1531), where he was Agent and the sword Medium. The superlative used of him, *wigena strengest*, like the technique of gnomic pronouncement previously discussed, encourages the reader to construct the meaning of one of a class of similar items, the class of 'strong warriors'. If Beowulf is the strongest of these strong warriors, who are moreover of a class called *feþecempa*, foot-soldiers, and *he* stumbles, loses his footing, then this is the fall, the failure of the effectiveness of heroic action — even his resolution, his strength are not enough.

The reversal of this reversal is told in lines 1545–56. It is from this point on, the nature of the hero and his sphere of heroic action having been well established, that a relationship between an heroic and a Christian world-view is textually realized. The lines begin with Beowulf at his lowest point — grammatically and lexically. Not only is he the Goal of the process, but the monster *sits* on him! The clause complex in lines 1545–47a is the high point of the monster's success in the encounter, and the narration presents it from her point of view. The noun used of Beowulf, *selegyst*, constructs him as alien; further, the narrator gives the monster's motivation for her actions (*wrecan*, the motive endorsed by Beowulf in l. 1385).

Two things save Beowulf. First, his armour is again the instrument of his protection. Secondly, the narrator tells us, 'holy God wielded battle-victory'. In line 1556b Beowulf himself has the Actor role: he stands up. After this action (*sypðan*, l. 1555), God can 'decide it with justice'. In line 1556, the adverb *eft* again carries the alliteration, again giving phonological emphasis to the meaning of reversal in a heard reading.

God, when brought in as Agent (in relation to *geweold,* l. 1554 and *gesced,* l. 1555), is named three times in as many lines: *halig God, witig Drihten, rodera Rædend.* Textually, this repetition encourages the reader to construct the importance of the new information. (Compare this use of variation for the repetition of experiential meaning with the previously discussed examples of variation with negated antitheses.) It is from this stage in the text that the social context, in which an heroic world-view and a Christian are reconciled, can be constructed from the grammatical telling. God's intervention, after Beowulf's heroic resoluteness in standing up, triggers off — not an *action* by Beowulf but a perception, a mental process: *astod* (l. 1556) is immediately followed by *geseah* (l. 1557). The narrative time then stops for a sequence of relational statements, a description of the nature of the sword. As God, given the animate Agent role, was given textual emphasis by variation, so the sword, to be given the inanimate Agent role (to be discussed below), is given its proper prominence in the narrative.

There then follows, in lines 1563–68a, a passage which gives the lie to any critic who, irked by the 'lack of steady advance'[14] in *Beowulf*, might suggest that the *Beowulf* poet could not write dramatic action narrative. The text presents a concentration of action processes, all part of the one heroic action; *gefeng*, 'seized'; *gebrægd*, 'drew'; *sloh*, 'struck', all with Beowulf as experiential Agent and Actor, and *grapode*, 'bit'; *bræc*, 'broke'; *þurhwod*, 'passed through', all with the sword as Agent and Actor.[15] The narrative pace is slowed to less than normal speed, like cinematic slow motion, as we follow the sequence of Beowulf's actions with the sword in six processes (neatly balanced in three for the animate participant and three for the inanimate). Just as variation gives textual prominence to an action or attribute, this sequential elongation of the representation of one event gives textual importance to that event. In particular, this sequence leaves the reader/listener in no doubt that effective action is still constructed as the central matter of an heroic story, despite the earlier emphasis on mental attitude.

The narration of lines 1568b–69 is similar to the camera close-up, with swift cuts from one cinematic subject to another in the same scene. In three paratactic clauses, the subject position is occupied in turn by the participants which, in the

previous action processes, functioned in each of the associated direct semantic roles. The outcome for each participant is succinctly told. First, *Heo on flet gecrong*, 'she fell dead on the floor', *heo* has the Medium role in relation to *gecrong*. Secondly, *sweord wæs swatig*, 'the sword was bloody', *sweord* functions as Carrier in a relational clause with the Attribute *swatig* — a metonymic sign, by which the reader can construct that the sword has been used, and, as an Attribute, sustaining the additional construction that it has been used as such an instrument should be. It is of the proper nature of a sword to be bloody, as of God to be *halig* and *witig* (ll. 1553/54). Thirdly, *secg weorce gefeh*, 'the man rejoiced in the work', *secg* has a Senser role in relation to the mental process *gefeh*: the proper conclusion of heroic action is the mental recognition of its success.[16]

Though Beowulf's activities in the *niðsele* continue till line 1590, the telling of the fight with Grendel's mother is now complete. Lines 1570–72 can be read as a final comment. Just as monster, sword, and man were mentioned in summary clauses in lines 1568–69, the fourth participant in the narration, God, can be read into the text here with the repeated reference to 'light'. The intertextual context of other Old English poems is suggestive: for example, in *Exodus*, line 115b, *heofoncandel* refers to the pillar of fire, through which God guided the Israelites by night.[17] And again, light is often associated with the Cross, as in line 5b of *The Dream of the Rood*.[18]

From such detailed discussion of the text we come at last to my central question: in this first telling of Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother, how do the transitivity choices construct the relation between Christian and heroic viewpoints? I suggest a tri-stratal model of transitivity choices: God (Actor/Agent) gives (material process),[19] which enables Beowulf (Senser) to see (mental process) the ancient sword (Phenomenon), which enables the action processes of the heroic world to be set in motion, by Beowulf (Actor/Agent), using the ancient sword (circumstance of Means, which was the Phenomenon of the enabling perception) against Grendel's mother (Goal/Medium). This structure could be described as paradigmatic, because all processes relate to one narrated heroic action, and directional, because the roles of God and man are not reciprocal, for the role of God as initiator is necessarily primary. (The structure of the hero and lord relationship, to anticipate the discussion of the second and third tellings, is quite different and could be described as syntagmatic and reciprocal.) Such a paradigm as this has already 'written in', as a likely semantic possibility, that the enemy who is ultimately assigned the role of Goal/Medium in relation to the heroic action processes will also be viewed, textually, as an enemy of God. If it is sustained, this paradigm supplies enormous

generalizing power to the narrator's point of view in the text: regardless of the apparent diversity of individual or particular heroic actions, all stem from 'God gives' and the world can be sorted into good and bad participants according to God's giving.

It could be objected that I have over-interpreted the text in the suggested 'directional paradigm'. In particular, the relationship between God's decision (*gesced,* 1. 1555) and Beowulf's perception of the sword (*geseah,* 1. 1557) is not explicit in the grammar. For further textual evidence to support this interpretation, we must turn to the next telling of Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother, in Beowulf's speech to Hrothgar, lines 1652 to 1676. The central part of this speech makes explicit Beowulf's understanding of God's role in his success. In addition, the opening and closing sections of the speech allow the reader to construct from the language of the text the close relationship of hero, king, and people in the society of the poem.

The first verse, line 1652a, brings together the three earthly participants in this speech situation: *we* (Agent/Actor) Beowulf and the Geats, *þe* (Recipient) Hrothgar, and *þas sælac* (Medium/Goal) the hilt of the ancient sword and Grendel's head. In my reading, Hrothgar is thus the recipient of the heroic action, symbolically represented by *þas sælac*, as is appropriate for a lord. From line 1654, Beowulf moves into the past tense, the beginning of his narrative, 'telling the story'. In line 1655, Beowulf (*ic*) assigns himself the Actor role in relation to two action processes (*gedigde, geneþde*) but emphasizes his difficulty in sustaining this role (*unsofte, earfoðlice*). In lines 1657b–58, the textual suggestion of Beowulf's difficulty is grammatically increased (Beowulf does not assign himself an Actor role), though further grammatical 'decline' is possible (for example, assigning himself the role of Goal, or Medium to another's Agent).[20] In line 1657b, indicative mood, not subjunctive, is used (*wæs*). One reading of this is that Beowulf considers his loss of the battle a fact, in human terms, or in terms of his own powers as a hero. (That story is continued in line 1658b, a possible future in the past: Beowulf knew he was dead unless . . .) In line 1658b God functions in the Agent/Actor role, Beowulf the Medium/Goal in relation to the process *scylde*, with an apparent contradiction of my tri-stratal model in which God and Beowulf are not direct participants of the same process (Recipient is an indirect, more peripheral, role). But this process is a lexical metaphor, taken from the heroic world of action processes (of course quite conventional in New Testament imagery). 'Shielded' could be paraphrased congruently as 'should give me protection', where protection is unspecified exactly because it will be specific to the worldly context. In this literal

paraphrase, 'me' has a recipient semantic role. In lines 1659–60, the grammar of the experiential system offers the agent role to *ic* in relation to *gewyrcan*, but the negation of the modal, 'I could not', denies the effectiveness of this role to the participant. The experiential meaning establishes the general heroic world: this is a situation where a hero does something. Simultaneously, the interpersonal meaning establishes the particular context of action: this hero is powerless. The two words, *wiht* and *gewyrcan*, are both very general lexical items, superordinate words for large paradigms of specific types of actions. Through such generality, the capacity of the hero is completely negated. This negation is specifically linked to the hero, the participant who should occupy the animate Agent role, whereas the sword, textually characterized as inanimate Agent role or circumstance of Means, is allowed to be a weapon which 'avails' or 'is capable' (*duge*). The positive statement of the weapon (*duge* as focus) contrasts with the negative of the hero (*ne meahte*, negated ability, as Theme). The naming of the sword, Hrunting, suggests to me a superlative in a class of lesser swords. If a sword effective enough in the heroic world to carry a name (and that name alliterating with the Danish royal house) cannot be used, then a whole swag of lesser swords would be of no use either.

Now complete is the move commenced by Beowulf in line 1655, when he introduced the difficulty he had in that situation of fulfilling the proper hero's role of Agent/Actor. Difficulty has now become impossibility, and help given from an earthly source, however good, is of no use.

The text now turns on that usual word of antithesis, *ac*, 'but' (l. 1661a). In Beowulf's speech, the text explicitly 'tells' us what, I have already suggested, is implicit in the first, that is the narrator's, version of events. In line 1661, *Ac me geuðe ylda Waldend*, 'the Ruler/Wielder of men granted to me . . .', God (Agent/Actor) gives (material process) Beowulf (Recipient). What is given is projected hypotactically:[21] in essence, *þæt ic* (Senser), *geseah* (mental process), *sweord* (Phenomenon). The sword is given several attributes: *wlitig* (*hangian*), *eald* (*sweord*), *eacen* — 'beautiful, old, and giant', that is quality and quantity, stretching back in time. Explicitly, the recipient receives the capacity for perception, not action itself. We construct the textual importance attributed to Beowulf's acknowledging, to Hrothgar, the significance of divine intervention, in the universalizing restatement of lines 1663b–64a: *oftost wisode | winigea leasum. Wisian* is typically translated 'guide', as in Swanton, 'he has often guided the friendless thus', or Klaeber, 'show the way, guide, direct, lead'. Specifically, Beowulf has been directed in his perception, mentally guided, in the situation, but the use of *wisian* allows other types of guidance to be 'written in', such as a familiar

resonance of the physical guidance through the wilderness in the *Exodus* story. In line 1664b, Beowulf makes explicit the relationship between the divinely enabled mental process and the material process of the heroic world: *þæt ic ðy wæpne gebræd*, 'so that I drew the weapon'. The material process (*gebræd*) is predicator in a clause which is hypotactically related to the clause of which *geseah* is the process, the subordinate clause having the circumstantial meaning of result.[22] To re-iterate, in lines 1661–64, Beowulf's account makes grammatically explicit through its dependency structure the 'directional paradigm' by which the Transitivity choices construct a 'social reality' in which Christian and heroic viewpoints can be read as integrated.

Having at last been permitted to occupy the Agent role, Beowulf modestly gives himself that role again only in the next verb, *ofsloh*, a process summarizing the whole event of the confrontation (compare this one verb with the sequence describing the killing in the narrator's description, ll. 1563–69a). Line 1665b has a participant 'I/me' (*þa me sæl ageald*) without the power and control of the Agent role, literally, 'when to me opportunity was offered'.[23] The text moves immediately to the aftermath of Beowulf's action with variation relating to the sword and to the dead monster, so that, even in death, the superlative awfulness of this enemy promotes the construction by Hrothgar as listener to Beowulf — that is, by us as modern readers of the text, of Hrothgar's response as listener — of the extreme nature of this heroic encounter.

The next clause complex (ll. 1668b–70) represents a transition to the present of the discourse reached by line 1671. Functionally, it exhibits a pattern similar to the opening sentence of Beowulf's speech: (l. 1652a) *we* (Subject and Actor/Agent), *þe* (Recipient), *þas sælac* (Goal/Medium) compared to (l. 1668) *Ic* (Subject and Actor/Agent), *þæt hilt* (Goal/Medium), *feondum* (negative Recipient).[24] At last Beowulf can represent himself (*ic*) as Agent in the thematic position of an independent clause, the first occurrence since line 1655. This representation continues over the next clause, and nominalization, the realization of processes as nouns (*fyrendæda*, from the congruent processes X did Y, Y is evil; *deaðcwealm Denigea*, from the congruent clauses X killed the Danes, the Danes die), produces a densely informative clause which condenses the social significance of a whole sequence of actions into the one clause. The explicit moral judgment in line 1670b, 'as it was proper', refers to an unspecified and, inferentially, public code, one which can be assumed as shared by speaker and audience. Beowulf's success in terms of *wrecan* lexically echoes the construction of an heroic code in earlier passages in the text.

The last sentence of Beowulf's speech, lines 1671–76 is, in Beowulf's present time, a projection of the Danes' future, in which the 'I' of Beowulf enables the 'you' of Hrothgar to occupy Heorot in a secure state of mind. It is a potentially indecorous speech, with Beowulf attributing fear to Hrothgar,[25] but decorum is safely maintained through, first, Beowulf's respectful address to Hrothgar by his social function (l. 1675a, *þeoden Scyldinga*) and, secondly, Hrothgar's fear and sorrow being represented as relating directly to that function: his fear is for his retainers' security. The lord's role is to worry for the general conditions of his people. The social interrelatedness of hero and king, king and people, is textually constructed in the use of pronouns in this sentence. As in the opening line of this speech (l. 1652), initially first and second person pronouns are closely placed in the a-verse (l. 1671). From line 1670, with the exception of line 1675, the second person occurs in each b-verse, juxtaposed with a nominal or pronominal reference to the people. In line 1673, *þinra* even carries the alliteration with *þegna*.[26]

The third telling of Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother takes place at the end of the long speech by Beowulf to Hygelac on his return to Geatland. Beowulf's speech occupies lines 2000–2151. The account of the fight with Grendel's mother begins at line 2131. The account is succinct, but even in these few lines the telling is such that social relationships relevant to the situation of the telling are given prominence. In line 2131, three participants are introduced into the discourse: *se þeoden* (Hrothgar), *mec* (Beowulf), *þine* in *þine life* (Hygelac); Hrothgar and Hygelac are linked by alliteration. Beowulf is 'writing Hygelac into the story'. Here is another example of the proper decorum, in an heroic context, between king and hero, this time when the king is also the hero's lord. Beowulf avoided indecorously attributing 'fear' to Hrothgar in the second 'telling'. In this third account, Hrothgar's state of mind is alluded to (*hreohmod*, 'disturbed in mind'), and the verbal process with which he is associated (*healsode*, 'implored', 'entreated') emphasizes the need which Hrothgar had for something (Beowulf's prowess) which 'belongs' to Hygelac (that is, which is in Hygelac's power to distribute). The difficulty of this task is acknowledged in Hrothgar's projection (ll. 2132b–34a), which nicely, in variation, provides a gloss on *eorlscipe*, 'heroism': it is exhibited by one who *ealdre geneðde*, 'should risk life', *mærðo fremede,* 'should do a glorious deed'. (This gloss supports the earlier discussion of heroic action in relation to the gnomic generalization of ll. 1534b-36.) In Beowulf's account to Hrothgar, Beowulf emphasized that the task had been difficult (ll. 1655–57a). This account to Hygelac has lexical echoes (*ealdre,* ll. 1655/2133b; *geneðde,* ll. 1656b/2133b; *unsoft(e),* ll. 1655a/2140a) but not verse (formulaic) repetition.

The difficulty of the task is not, however, Beowulf's primary emphasis here, as it was for Hrothgar.

For Hygelac, the emphasis in Beowulf's account is on 'reward': Hrothgar promised Beowulf *mede* (l. 2134b) and made good his promise (ll. 2142–47). Only five or so lines describe the actual encounter with Grendel's mother; as many or more describe the reward for this action. Perhaps the account of the battle can be brief because it is *wide cuð* (l. 2135b) (to the Geats? as well as to the Danes? certainly by now to the narrator's audience); what is important in the immediate social context of this telling is that Hygelac can realize that his hero/retainer has performed a difficult deed, which brings glory to Hygelac, being 'for his sake' (l. 2131b). This glory is tangibly established in the extent of the 'reward', and that this reward, and symbolically this glory, belong to Hygelac is established in Beowulf's action of giving the reward to Hygelac (ll. 2148–49a), the *beorncyning,* 'warrior-king'. Beowulf's independence of Hrothgar is emphasized (he claims to have been given treasures *on minne sylfes dom,* 'of my own choosing') in immediate juxtaposition to Beowulf's dependence on Hygelac (*gen is eall æt ðe | lissa gelong,* 'all favour is still dependent on you', ll. 2149b–50). Beowulf's tale of achievement ends, in a usual reading, with the focus on Hygelac (l. 2151). (The meaning of the focus is 'the end of new information for the listener', the most important part of the message.)

From this detailed study of the language in the second and third tellings, what meanings can readily be constructed for the heroic world in *Beowulf?* Earlier in this paper I claimed that the structure of the hero and lord relationship was 'syntagmatic and reciprocal'. It is syntagmatic because one action follows another in the idealized world of heroic behaviour. The hero gives glory to his lord, where glory means the renown of brave deeds. Essentially the hero gives deeds to his lord. The lord gives 'favour' to his follower, whatever is needed and socially valued. The relationship is reciprocal, because one action is not necessarily prior to the other, though each is mutually sustaining of the other. What lord and hero exchange is social recognition, 'glory' and 'favour', so it is in each one's interests to elevate the status of the other.[27]

A third participant in the heroic world, another lord, alters some of what is given to whom, but not the social significance of that giving. The hero gives the other lord deeds, as before, and receives reward. This reward is then given to his lord, or rather, the glory of which that reward is tangible witness is given, and his lord, as before, grants the hero 'favour' in return. The nature of the hero established in the first telling can now be read as sustaining this 'reciprocal

syntagmatic' relationship of man and lord. A social system which is based on a mutually sustaining sequence of actions must be underpinned by a shared belief in the appropriateness of those actions. Heroes must be of that state of mind which promotes action (*wrecan* is better than *murnan*), and lords must be of that state of mind which promotes prodigality (generosity is typically the praised attribute of those in power).[28] And finally, how can the 'reciprocal syntagmatic' relationship of the heroic world-view be related to the 'directional paradigmatic' relationship of the Christian world-view? Essentially, each heroic action in the syntagm is sustained, paradigmatically, by the enabling 'giving' from God to the hero. In the telling of an heroic story, in the sequence of deeds and gifts, the Christian/heroic paradigm is textually invisible — until the sequence of heroic actions is blocked, and the hero cannot act. It is then that explicit divine intervention can enable the story to continue.

This comparison of the three tellings of Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother has demonstrated how the telling of an event is accommodated within the demands of the social structure within which it takes place. Such textual evidence is particularly informative when the social context of the production of the text is considerably different from that of its readers, enabling the distant reader, in some measure, to reconstruct the social context from the text. The area of the social code which this social context/situation instantiates may well be that of literary conventions, but this context is no less 'real' in the culture than other ways it has of making sense of the world. In the particular case of the poem *Beowulf*, we have constructed two aspects of this social structure, each of them standing for what might be called a cliché of Old English scholarship. The first is the relationship of one individual to another in terms of their social roles, in particular, the relationship between hero and lord. This is usually referred to by the scholarly phrase, the *comitatus* relationship, but the poem *Beowulf* explores the two possibilities of a hero/lord relationship (the construction of the attributes of the hero is part of both these relationships), that of the conventional *comitatus* bond between a hero and *his* lord (Beowulf and Hygelac), and that between a hero and a lord of other men, who is *not* his lord (Beowulf and Hrothgar). The second aspect of the social structure exemplified is perhaps the more profoundly interesting: the representation of two ideologies, summarized in the usual labels of scholarship as 'heroic' and 'Christian', such that a reconciliation is constructed between them in the society enacted by the text.

NOTES

1   See, for example, Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, 1978).

2   *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 6 (1955), 339–55.

3   A comprehensive study of point of view was that by Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition* (Berkeley, 1973). Such studies looked at the 'meaning in the text' rather than considering the social situation, whether that of the author or of the reader/listener, in and through which meaning is produced.

4   The 'technical jargon' in this paper derives from the work of M. A. K. Halliday and others writing in the field of linguistics. See Appendix B.

5   Terry Threadgold, of the English Department at the University of Sydney, is doing much original work in this field. See, for example, her article, 'Stories of race and gender: an unbounded discourse', in *The Functions of Style*, edited by David Birch and Michael O'Toole (London, 1988), pp. 169–204.

6   Text and translation in Appendix A are from *Beowulf*, edited by Michael Swanton (Manchester, 1978). The text primarily referred to in the preparation of this paper is *Beowulf*, edited by Fr. Klaeber, third edition (Boston, 1950).

7   Christ was similarly described in *The Dream of the Rood*, edited by Bruce Dickins and Alan S. C. Ross, fourth edition (London, 1954; reprinted, 1965), ll. 33b–34: *Geseah ic þa Frean mancynnes | efstan elne mycle þæt he me wolde on gestigan.* Christ's heroic haste, like Beowulf's, is textually related to intention (*wolde*), but unheroic haste is similarly associated (*Beowulf*, ll. 1292–93, of Grendel's mother: *Heo wæs on ofste, wolde ut þanon, | feore beorgan*).

8   *brim wylm* can be given a recipient semantic role if *onfeng* is translated 'received' rather than 'took', 'seized', but Beowulf's role remains the same.

9   Other Old English poems allow us to construct *negative* solutions, such as that of 'restraining complaint' in *The Wanderer*, edited by R. F. Leslie (Manchester, 1966), ll. 11b–12, or

that of 'not losing heart in the face of defeat', as in *The Battle of Maldon*, in *Sweets Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse*, revised by C. T. Onions, fourteenth edition (Oxford, 1959), ll. 312–13.

10   *Niðsele* can be read as 'the hall *of one* hostile to him'.

11   Relevant sections are translated in *Beowulf and its Analogues* by G. N. Garmonsway, Jacqueline Simpson, and Hilda Ellis Davidson, second (revised) edition (London, 1980), p. 315.

12   What Kaja Silverman calls, following Emile Benveniste, the 'spoken subject' (for film, the position of the viewer) which is 'the subject who is constituted through identification with the subject of the speech, novel, or film' in *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford, 1983), p. 47.

13   This, I suggest, is irony conveyed through grammatical metaphor. 'She paid him (back with fierce grips)' is related to a congruent clause, such as 'She gripped him', in which Beowulf would have the Medium role. ('Beneficiary' is a general semantic role associated with an ergative analysis; 'Recipient' is a type of Beneficiary associated with Material Processes.)

14   A well-known sub-heading in Klaeber's discussion of the 'Structure of the poem', in his Introduction to *Beowulf*, p. lvii. Klaeber includes 'the odd sequel of the fight with Grendel's mother' in a list of 'typical examples of the rambling, dilatory method' (p. lviii).

15   The circumstance of Means ('whereby a process takes place') includes in principle the concepts of both agency and instrumentality. When 'told' as participant, the Agent can function as Actor (as in ll. 1566–68a). When Beowulf functions as Actor and Agent, the instrumentality of a sword is realized as a circumstance of Means (as in l. 1520). See M. A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London, 1985), p. 139.

16   In the context of an heroic world-view, I take *gefeon* to be the antonym of *murnan*. As the text has instructed us (ll. 1384–85), *wrecan* is preferable to *murnan*, and one who has successfully avenged a 'wicked deed' can then 'rejoice'. I have found both *murnan* and *gefeon* can be read in different contexts in *Beowulf* as verbal or even behavioural processes, but the central opposition of meaning is in the attitude of mind, sad *versus* happy.

17   See P. J. Lucas's commentary in his edition of *Exodus* (London, 1977), especially his comments on ll. 94b and 111 (pp. 91 and 94).

18   Jean Ritzke-Rutherford maintains that 'the motif of light and darkness' seems 'to determine whole structures and form a central theme' in the four Old English religious poems, *Elene, The Dream of the Rood, The Phoenix,* and *Christ (I, II,* and *III).* See her *Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing* (Frankfurt, 1979), pp. 209–26.

19   Without entering into theological dispute, I suggest it is evident in the textual choices that for God mental processes are also action processes: to decide *(gesced,* l. 1555) is to intervene in the world *(geweold wigsigor,* l. 1554).

20   The clause *Ætrihte wæs guð getwæfed,* with *guð* as Medium, is an example of 'grammatical metaphor'. The congruent clause is something like 'X killed Y in battle/during the battle', where 'battle' has an 'eventive' semantic role, an indirect circumstantial role. Event nouns, I suggest, lexically institutionalize a social ritual so that the event seems to have an existence independent of the participants involved (compare 'X killed Y while they were fighting'). The construction of the event *guð* or *hild* is central to 'telling a heroic story'.

21   In Modern English, projection is associated with verbal or mental processes (see the discussion of projection in, 'Above the clause: the clause complex,' in M. A. K. Halliday's *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London, 1985), pp. 227–48). In Modern English 'give' typically functions as a material process, whereas in Old English the lexical verbs for 'give' or 'grant' can realize a material process or a verbal process which accomplishes the material process. Bruce Mitchell implies this in Section 1952 of his *Old English Syntax,* 2 vols (Oxford, 1985), II, p. 12: 'words which introduce dependent statements can imply the idea of saying, agreeing, thinking, asking or knowing, giving or granting, obligation, forgetting and remembering and feeling.' I have omitted Mitchell's examples.

22   I note that Swanton translates the enabling sense, 'so that I might wield that weapon', but the Old English merges the enabling with the doing, 'so that I drew the weapon' — appropriate behaviour for a hero!

23   The translation of such clauses into Modern English is particularly misleading in terms of Transitivity choices. Klaeber glosses *agyldan:* 'pay; permit, make possible', and suggests as translation for line 1665, 'when I had an opportunity'. Swanton suggests, 'when my opportunity came'.

24   The meaning of the participants functioning as indirect object is of course reversed (one who receives, one who loses) because of the contrastive meanings of the processes (*brohton/ætferede*).

25   Also, Beowulf's use of modal auxiliaries in relation to Hrothgar, *most swepan* and *ne ðearft ondrædan*, could be constructed as a potentially indecorous granting of permission to a social superior.

26   Though pronouns are not 'normally' stressed. See A. J. Bliss's discussion in *The Metre of Beowulf*, revised edition (Oxford, 1967), pp. 6–7.

27   Rosemary Woolf has seen the 'reciprocal relationship' between Beowulf and Hygelac as central to the heroic ideal in *Beowulf*, though her discussion focuses on the final deed of 'effective vengeance' in 'The ideal of men dying with their lord in the *Germania* and in *The Battle of Maldon*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 5 (1976), 69–70.

28   For example, Hygd, Hygelac's wife, is praised for her generosity, which is contrasted with the imperious ways of Thryth (ll. 1926–32).

APPENDIX A

Extracts from *Beowulf*

1 Narrator's Telling

Æfter þæm wordum Weder-Geata leod
efste mid elne, nalas andsware
bidan wolde; brim wylm onfeng
hilderince. Ða wæs hwil dæge
ær he þone grundwong ongytan mehte.
<div align="right">(ll. 1492–96)</div>

With these words the prince of the Weder-Geats turned away boldly, would wait for no reply at all; the water's surge received the warrior. It was part of a day before he could catch sight of the level bottom.

Sona þæt onfunde, se ðe floda begong
heorogifre beheold hund missera,
grim ond grædig, þæt þær gumena sum
ælwihta eard ufan cunnode.
<div align="right">(ll. 1497–500)</div>

Straight away she who for a hundred seasons had kept watch on the flood's expanse, grim and greedy, fiercely ravenous, discovered that some man from up above was exploring the dwelling-place of monsters.

Grap þa togeanes, guðrinc gefeng
atolan clommum; no þy ær in gescod
halan lice; hring utan ymbbearh,
þæt heo þone fyrdhom ðurhfon ne mihte,
locene leoðosyrcan laþum fingrum.
<div align="right">(ll. 1501–05)</div>

Then she clutched at him, seized the warrior in a dreadful grip; yet for all that, she failed to injure the healthy body; ring-mail shielded him externally so that she could not thrust her hateful fingers through the war-dress, the interlocked shirt on his limbs.

Bær þa seo brimwylf, þa heo to botme
                    com,
hringa þengel to hofe sinum,
swa he ne mihte, no he þæs modig wæs,
wæpna gewealdan; ac hine wundra þæs
                    fela
swencte on sunde, sædeor monig
hildetuxum heresyrcan bræc,
ehton aglæcan.   (ll. 1506–12a)

Then, when she came to the bottom, the water-wolf carried the commander of rings into her lair, so that — no matter how resolute he might be — he was unable to wield his weapons; and a host of weird creatures harried him in the deep; many a sea-beast (with battle tusks) tore at his battle-shirt; monsters pursued him.

     Ða se eorl ongeat
þæt he in niðsele nathwylcum wæs,
þær him nænig wæter wihte ne sceþede,
ne him for hrofsele hrinan ne mehte
færgripe flodes. Fyrleoht geseah,
blacne leoman beorhte scinan.
                 (ll. 1512b–17)

Then the hero realized that he was in some sort of enemy hall, where no water could harm him at all, nor could the flood's sudden grip touch him because of the vaulted hall. He saw fire-light, a pale gleam shining brightly.

Ongeat þa se goda grundwyrgenne,
merewif mihtig. Mægenræs forgeaf
hildebille, hond sweng ne ofteah,
þæt hire on hafelan hringmæl agol
grædig guðleoð.   (ll. 1518–22a)

Then the great man perceived the accursed creature of the depths, the powerful lake-wife. He made a mighty onslaught with his war-sword, his hand not withholding the blow, so that the ring-adorned thing sang a greedy war-song on her head.

     Ða se gist onfand
þæt se beadoleoma bitan nolde,
aldre scepðan, ac seo ecg geswac
ðeodne æt þearfe. Ðolode ær fela
hondgemota, helm oft gescær,
fæges fyrdhrægl; ða wæs forma sið
deorum madme, þæt his dom alæg.
                (ll. 1522b–28)

Then the newcomer discovered that the battle-brand would not bite, harm her life, but the edge failed the prince in his need. It had endured many hand-to-hand encounters before, often sheared through helmet, war-coat of a doomed man; it was the first occasion for this precious treasure that its glory failed.

Eft wæs anræd, nalas elnes læt,
mærða gemyndig mæg Hyglaces.
Wearp ða wundenmæl wrættum gebunden
yrre oretta, þæt hit on eorðan læg,
stið ond stylecg; strenge getruwode,
mundgripe mægenes.   (ll. 1529–34a)

Again Hygelac's kinsman was resolute, in no way slack in courage, remembering famous deeds. Then the angry champion threw down the patterned blade, inlaid with ornament, so that it lay on the ground, rigid and steel-edged; he put his trust in strength, his mighty hand-grip.

Swa sceal man don,
þonne he æt guðe gegan penceð
longsumne lof; na ymb his lif cearað.
                    (ll. 1534b–36)

So ought a man to do when he means to gain long-lasting praise in battle; he cares nothing for his life.

Gefeng þa be eaxle — nalas for fæhðe
                    mearn —
Guð-Geata leod Grendles modor.
Brægd þa beadwe heard, þa he gebolgen
                    wæs,
feorhgeniðlan, þæt heo on flet gebeah.
                    (ll. 1537–40)

Then the prince of the War-Geats seized Grendel's mother by the shoulder — he felt no remorse for the quarrel. Now swollen with rage, battle-hardened, he dragged his mortal enemy so that she fell to the floor.

Heo him eft hraþe andlean forgeald
grimman grapum, ond him togeanes feng.
Oferwearp þa werigmod wigena strengest,
feþecempa, þæt he on fylle wearð.
                    (ll. 1541–44)

Swiftly she paid him back again with fierce grips, and clutched at him. Weary at heart, the strongest of fighters, of foot-soldiers, then stumbled so that he took a fall.

Ofsæt þa þone selegyst ond hyre seax
                    geteah,
brad ond brunecg; wolde hire bearn
                    wrecan,
angan eaferan. Him on eaxle læg
breostnet broden; þæt gebearh feore,
wið ord ond wið ecge ingang forstod.
                    (ll. 1545–49)

Then she sat upon the visitor to the hall and drew her knife, broad and bright-edged; she wished to avenge her son, her sole offspring. On his shoulder lay a woven breast-net; that protected his life, prevented entry by point and by edge.

Hæfde ða forsiðod sunu Ecgþeowes
under gynne grund, Geata cempa,
nemne him heaðobyrne helpe gefremede,
herenet hearde, ond halig God
geweold wigsigor. Witig Drihten,
rodera Rædend, hit on ryht gesced
yðelice, syþðan he eft astod.

(ll. 1550–56)

Ecgtheow's son, the champion of the Geats, would have fared badly beneath the wide ground then, had the war-mail, hard war-net, not afforded help, and holy God brought about victory in battle. Once he stood up again, the wise Lord, Ruler of the Heavens, easily decided it with justice.

Geseah ða on searwum sigeeadig bil,
ealdsweord eotenisc ecgum þyhtig,
wigena weorðmynd; þæt wæs wæpna
                                               cyst,
buton hit wæs mare ðonne ænig mon oðer
to beadulace ætberan meahte,
god ond geatolic, giganta geweorc.

(ll. 1557–62)

Then he saw among the armour a victory-blessed blade, an ancient sword made by ogres, firm in its edges, the pride of fighters; it was the choicest of weapons, save that it was larger than other man might carry out to battle-play — fine and splendid, the work of giants.

He gefeng þa fetelhilt, freca Scyldinga,
hreoh ond heorogrim, hringmæl gebrægd;
aldres orwena, yrringa sloh,
þæt hire wið halse heard grapode,
banhringas bræc; bil eal ðurhwod
fægne flæschoman.   (ll. 1563–68a)

He seized the belted hilt, the Scyldings' daring champion, savage and deadly grim, drew the patterned blade; despairing of life, he struck angrily so that it bit her hard on the neck, broke the bone-rings; the sword passed straight through the doomed body.

          Heo on flet gecrong;
sweord wæs swatig; secg weorce gefeh.
Lixte se leoma, leoht inne stod,
efne swa of hefene hadre scineð
rodores candel.   (ll. 1568b–72a)

She fell dead on the floor; the sword was bloody; the man rejoiced in his work. Light shone, brightness gleamed within, just as the candle of the sky shines clearly from heaven.

239

II Beowulf's Speech to Hrothgar

'Hwæt, we þe þas sælac, sunu
                                    Healfdenes,
leod Scyldinga, lustum brohton,
tires to tacne, þe þu her to locast.
                        (ll. 1652–54)

Well, son of Healfdene, prince of Scyldings, we have gladly brought you this sea-plunder which you look on here, as a token of success.

Ic þæt unsoft ealdre gedigde,
wigge under wætere, weorc geneþde
earfoðlice. Ætrihte wæs
guð getwæfed, nymðe mec God scylde.
Ne meahte ic æt hilde mid Hruntinge
wiht gewyrcan, þeah þæt wæpen duge.
                        (ll. 1655–60)

I hardly came through it alive, the underwater conflict, engaged in the business not without difficulty. The battle would have ended at once had God not shielded me. I could accomplish nothing with Hrunting in the fight, fine though that weapon may be.

Ac me geuðe ylda Waldend
þæt ic on wage geseah wlitig hangian
ealdsweord eacen — oftost wisode
winigea leasum — þæt ic ðy wæpne
                                    gebræd.
                        (ll. 1661–64)

But the Ruler of men granted me that I should see hanging, beautiful on the wall, an enormous ancient sword — he has often guided the friendless thus — so that I might wield that weapon.

Ofsloh ða æt þære sæcce, þa me sæl
                                    ageald,
huses hyrdas. Þa þæt hildebil
forbarn, brogdenmæl, swa þæt blod
                                    gesprang,
hatost heaþoswata. Ic þæt hilt þanan
feondum ætferede, fyrendæda wræc,
deaðcwealm Denigea, swa hit gedefe
                                    wæs.
                        (ll.1665–70)

Then in the conflict, when my opportunity came, I struck down the guardians of that house. Then that war-sword, the patterned blade, burned away as the blood gushed out, the hottest of battle-gore. I have brought back that hilt from the foes, avenged the evil deeds, the slaughter of Danes, as was fitting.

Ic hit þe þonne gehate þæt þu on Heorote
most
sorhleas swefan mid þinra secga gedryht
ond þegna gehwylc þinra leoda,
duguðe ond iogoþe, þæt þu him ondrædan
ne þearft,
þeoden Scyldinga, on þa healfe,
aldorbealu eorlum, swa þu ær dydest.'
(ll. 1671–76)

I promise you, then, that you may
sleep in Heorot free from care, with
your band of men and every thane of
your people, tried warriors and youths
— that you need not fear deadly injury
to your soldiers from that quarter, as
you did before, prince of Scyldings!

III Beowulf's Speech to Hygelac

'þa se ðeoden mec ðine life
healsode hreohmod, þæt ic on holma
geþring
eorlscipe efnde, ealdre geneðde,
mærðo fremede; he me mede gehet.
(ll. 2131–34)

Then, troubled in mind, the prince
implored me that, for your sake, I
should display heroism in the tumult
of waters, should risk life, should
achieve a glorious deed; he promised
me reward.

Ic ða ðæs wælmes, þe is wide cuð,
grimne gryrelicne grundhyrde fond.
Þær unc hwile wæs hand gemæne;
holm heolfre weoll, ond ic heafde becearf
in ðam guðsele Grendeles modor
eacnum ecgum.   (ll. 2135–40a)

Then, as is widely known, I found in
the surge a terrible grim guardian of
the deep. There for a time we locked,
hand-to-hand; the water welled with
blood, and in that war-hall I cut off the
head of Grendel's mother with a great
blade.

Unsofte þonan
feorh oðferede; næs ic fæge þa gyt;
ac me eorla hleo eft gesealde
maðma menigeo, maga Healfdenes.
(ll. 2140b–43)

I hardly got away from there alive — I
was not yet doomed to die; but the
defence of warriors, Healfdene's
kinsman, again bestowed on me many
treasures.

Swa se ðeodkyning þeawum lyfde;
nealles ic ðam leanum forloren hæfde,
mægnes mede, ac he me maðmas geaf,
sunu Healfdenes, on minne sylfes dom;
ða ic ðe, beorncyning, bringan wylle,
estum geywan.   (ll. 2144–49a)

The king of that nation lived thus in the traditional manner; I lost no reward whatever, the recompense of strength, but Healfdene's son gave me treasures of my own choosing; these I wish to bring to you, warrior king, to present with good will.
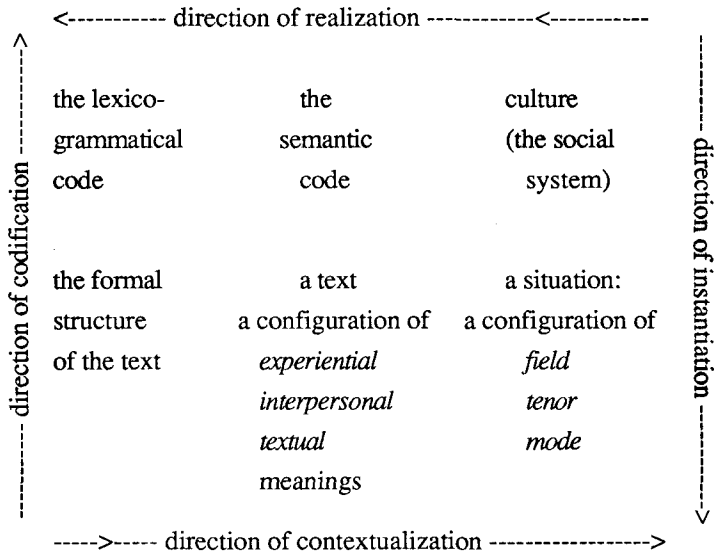
            Gen is eall æt ðe
lissa gelong; ic lyt hafo
heafodmaga, nefne Hygelac ðec!'
                    (ll. 2149b–51)

All favour is still dependent on you; I have few close kinsmen except for you, Hygelac!

APPENDIX B

The linguistic approach of M. A. K. Halliday[1]

The following figure summarizes the information below.

```
        <----------- direction of realization ------------<-----------
   ^
   |
---|--      the lexico-            the             culture
   |        grammatical           semantic        (the social
   | code                code               system)                    direction of instantiation
   |
   |        the formal            a text          a situation:
   |        structure       a configuration of    a configuration of
   | of the text          experiential          field
   |                      interpersonal           tenor
   |                      textual                 mode
   |                      meanings
   |
        ----->----- direction of contextualization ----------------->
```

(figure: direction of codification running vertically on the left; direction of instantiation running vertically on the right)

1 The study of language in a social-semiotic perspective[2]

Halliday understands semiotics as 'the study of sign systems', that is, the study of meaning in its most general sense. A culture (the social system) is a set of semiotic systems, a set of systems of meaning, all of which interrelate. Language is one among other bearers of meanings (gestures, music, dress, family structure, etc.); the semantic code is that system of meanings which can be realized in language. The semantic code in turn is realized in the lexicogrammatical code, the choices of word and grammatical structure.

One aspect of the social system is the social structure, 'the specific form of organization of a given society'. 'It is the social structure which determines which types of social context (situation) will be of central importance: the status and role relations (tenor), the types of activity (field), and even the available media and types

of rhetorical function (mode).'[3] A particular situation is an instantiation of the social structure.

For Halliday, the way to understand language lies in the study of texts, 'always with emphasis on the situation, as the context in which texts unfold and in which they are to be interpreted'. (Contextualization can be visualized as the reverse direction of realization.) 'Because of its nature as a semantic entity, a text . . . has to be considered from two perspectives at once, both as a product and as a process . . . The text is a product in the sense that it is an output, something that can be recorded and studied, having a certain construction that can be represented in systematic terms. It is a process in the sense of a continuous process of semantic choice, a movement through the network of meaning potential, with each set of choices constituting the environment for a further set.'

The text in its lexicogrammatical structure is a particular instantiation of the lexicogrammatical code, and the meanings read into the text (contextually) are chosen from the resources of the semantic code (instantiation). Conversely, codification (my term) refers to the way in which the code as a resource is in turn endorsed by or a product of use. This direction is important in Halliday's explanation of the evolution of the semantic system, 'The system is determined by the process. It is this perspective that is implied by the notion of a "functional" theory of language.'[4]

2.1 Semantic Systems and Constituent Analysis of the Clause

When a semiotic act (a meaningful act in the culture) is realized as a verbal act, the choices from the semantic code realize the field of discourse (what is going on) as experiential meanings (Transitivity, Naming, etc.), the tenor of discourse (who is taking part) as interpersonal meanings (Mood, Modality, Person, etc.), and the mode of discourse (the role assigned to language) as textual meanings (Theme, Information (focus), Cohesive Relations). The labels 'Transitivity', 'Mood', and so on, are the names of Systems, networks of meaning choices, from which the language user must choose at a particular rank of grammatical structure. In the English clause, with certain entry conditions, the user chooses from the systems of Transitivity, Mood, and Theme.[5]

2.2 Transitivity

'Transitivity specifies the different types of process ("goings on") that are recognized in the language, and the structures by which they are expressed . . . A process consists potentially of three components: the process itself, participants in the process, circumstances associated with the process.' The process is congruently (most typically) realized in the verbal group, participants by nominal groups, and circumstances by adverbial groups or prepositional phrases. 'Nominalization' describes the realization of a process in a nominal group (see chapter 10, 'Beyond the clause: metaphorical modes of expression', in Halliday's *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*).

Transitivity can be viewed from two different perspectives:

i) Causation: the Ergative/non-Ergative analysis. Is a participant who/which causes the process specified in addition to the participant involved in the process? From this point of view, the clause consists of a nucleus of process and a Medium, a participant through which the process is 'actualized', comes into existence. In addition to the Medium there may be another participant, the Agent, functioning as an external cause.

ii) Extension: the Transitive/Intransitive analysis. Is the meaning of the process extended from one participant to another? From this point of view there are different types of process, each with its own associated semantic roles for participants to occupy. (The following table is not a complete description of the choices available.)

Process type	Meaning	Semantic Roles
material:	'doing'	Actor, Goal, Recipient
action	'doing'	
event	'happening'	
mental:	'sensing'	Senser, Phenomenon
perception	e.g. 'seeing'	
affection	'feeling'	
cognition	'thinking'	

verbal	'saying'	Sayer
relational:	'being'	
i) attribution	'attributing'	Carrier, Attribute
ii) identification	'identifying'	Identified, Identifier

In this paper I look at *all* processes from the transitive point of view, and at material processes only from an ergative point of view. The latter is particularly informative in displaying the power relationships of the verbally constructed situation.

2.3 Mood

The clause is analysed into two constituents which realize the semantic functions of Mood and Residue. Within Mood are the functions (meanings) of Subject and Finiteness, whose arrangement signals the choice of one Mood or another. Finiteness 'relates the proposition to its context in the speech event', by reference to the time of speaking (Primary Tense) and by reference to the judgment of the speaker (Modality and Polarity).

Meaning choices

Primary Tense	past, present, future
Polarity	positive, negative
Modality	degrees of probability, of frequency, of obligation, and of inclination.

2.4 Theme and Information

The clause is analysed into two constituents which realize the semantic functions of Theme and Rheme. The Theme is the starting point of the message from the point of view of the speaker ('what I am talking about') and in English occurs in initial position in the clause. The unmarked Theme is the most likely choice for a

particular Mood (for example, Subject for Declarative Mood, the congruent Mood for making statements). Information units correspond to a unit of phonology (sound), the tone group. The focus is typically the stressed syllable of the last lexical word (such as a noun, lexical verb, or adjective) in the tone group. The focus marks the end of new information for the listener, 'what I want you to know' from the point of view of the speaker.[6]

NOTES TO APPENDIX B

[1]   A brief account of the development of Halliday's thought appears in the 'Introduction' by Gunther Kress to his selection from Halliday's writings, *Halliday: System and Function in Language* (Oxford, 1976), pp. vii–xxi.

[2]   The most accessible introduction is Part A of *Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social–Semiotic Perspective*, by M. A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan (Deakin University, Victoria, 1985). See also M. A. K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (London, 1978).

[3]   Christopher S. Butler, *Systemic Linguistics: Theory and Applications* (London, 1985), p. 68. Chapter 4, 'Sociological Semantics', gives a useful overview of Halliday's approach (pp. 58–76).

[4]   'Language as Code and Language as Behaviour: A Systemic–Functional Interpretation of the Nature and Ontogenesis of Dialogue,' in *The Semiotics of Culture and Language, Volume I: Language as Social Semiotic*, edited by Robin F. Fawcett, M. A. K. Halliday, Sydney M. Lamb, and Adam Makkai, 2 vols (London, 1984), pp. 3–35 (p. 7).

[5]   For a detailed description of the grammar see M. A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London, 1985). Chapters 3, 4, and 5 treat Theme, Mood, and Transitivity respectively.

[6]   The interrelationship of choice of Theme and Rheme, and Given and New, is discussed by Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, ch. 8, pp. 278–81, and ch. 9, pp. 315–16.