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The Balanced Parallel in *Beowulf*

Rory McTurk

Parallelism may be defined for present purposes as the use in poetry of two or more equivalent expressions, the second and any subsequent ones of which could be removed without detriment to the syntax or the essential meaning of the passage in which they occur. In 'the Old English epic style', according to Alistair Campbell in his article of that title in the Tolkien *Festschrift* of 1962, 'the simplest type of parallel is the balanced one, where an element generally double is repeated by one syntactically equivalent and of approximately equal bulk'.¹ I offer here what I would cautiously claim is a complete list of the balanced parallels in *Beowulf*, indicating as clearly as possible the kinds of syntactic context in which they occur. In preparing the list I have allowed myself the leeway that seems to be granted by Campbell's adverb 'generally' in including examples of paralleled elements that cannot easily be described as 'double', most notably ones consisting of simplex words. With Campbell's 'approximately' in mind, moreover, I have also included, particularly among the lengthier examples, parallels in which there is some difference in 'bulk', or word-length, between elements, but not so much as to affect the balance between them established by their syntactic equivalence. Examples are given by reference to the numbers of lines and half-lines in which they occur, and are quoted for the most part only in cases where they are not precisely coextensive with those lines or half-lines. All instances of parallels occurring in chiasmic form are noted. The examples were collected from the text of *Beowulf* in Fr. Klaeber's third edition² and have been checked in the editions of George Jack³ and Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson (M&R)⁴. Reference is made below to one or more of these editions as appropriate. Page references are given only in cases where doubt might otherwise arise.

(i) *Simplex noun or pronoun*

In nominative (as subject): 593b (*hige*), 594a (*sefa*); 880a (*hē*), 881a (*ēam*); 1783b (*worn fela*); 2210b (*ān*), 2211b (*draca*; provided that *ān* may be taken as substantival here, as Klaeber's Glossary would suggest).

In accusative (as object): 530a (*worn fela*); 1989a (*sæcce*), 1990a (*hilde*); 2925a (*Hæðcen Hrēþling*; Klaeber appears to treat each of these names as simplex rather than compound in his glossary of Proper Names); 3131b (*dracan*), 3132a (*wyrm*).

In partitive genitive: 36b (*mādma*), 37b (*frætwa*); 1829b (*þegna*), 1830a (*hæleþa*).

In dative (as object): 1446b (*hreþre*), 1447b (*aldre*).

In dative (as adverb-equivalent): 235b (*brymmum*), 236a (*mundum*); 1097a (*elne*), 1097b (*āðum*) (a questionable example, because of the uncertain syntactical relationship of *elne* and *āðum* to the unexplained form *unflitme*, which occurs between them); 1674b (*him*), 1676a (*eorlum*); 2020a (*duguðe*), 2021a (*eorlum*; the first element in the parallel forms part of the adverb-equivalent for [*d*] *juguðe*).

(ii) *Compound noun*

In nominative (as subject): 476b (*fletwerod*), 477a (*wīghēap*); 484a (*medoheal*), 485a (*drihtsele*); 1666b (*hildebil*), 1667a (*brogdenmæġ*); 2893b (*eorlweorod*), 2895a (the first element is singular, and the second plural; a verb in the singular (*sæt*, 2894b), of which the first element in the parallel, at least, is clearly the subject, occurs between the two elements); 2961a (*Ongendīow*), 2962a *blondenfexa* (provided that the weak adjective *blondenfexa* may be taken as substantival).⁵

In nominative (vocatively): 254b (*feorbūend*), 255a.

In accusative (as object): 283b, 284a (*þrēanyrd*); 830a (*oncypðe*), 830b; 993b (*wīnreced*), 994a (*gestsele*); 1713b, 1714a; 2747b (*ærwelan*), 2748a (*goldæht*).

As the subject accusative element in an accusative and infinitive construction: 1345a (*londbūend*), 1346a.

In possessive genitive: 1a (*Gār-Dena*), 2a (provided that, as Jack and M&R consider possible, the first noun is not dependent on the second); 463b (*Sūð-Dena*), 464b; 1004b, 1006a.

In partitive genitive: 1108b, 1109a (*beadorinca*); 1888b, 1889a (*hægstealdra*; provided that Klaeber's and Jack's punctuation – which implies a substantival use here of the adjective *felamōdigra* – may be accepted); 1946a

(*lēodbealewa*), 1947a; 2426b (*gūðræsa*), 2427a; 2623b, 2624a (*æghwæs*; compound pronoun in the second element. The parallel depends on *gūðgewæda* in l.2623b being accepted as genitive plural (so Jack and cf. Klaeber), rather than accusative plural (so M&R), and as not being dependent on *æghwæs*).

In dative (as adverb-equivalent or as part of one): 774b, 775a (*searoþoncum*); 827b (*nihtweorce*), 828a; 875a (*Sigemunde*), 876a (provided that the manuscript reading *Sigemunde* may be retained, as Jack admits is possible); 1480b (*magþegnum*), 1481a; 1787b, 1788a (provided that Klaeber's punctuation – which implies a substantival use here of the adjective *ellenrōfum* – may be accepted); 2392b (*Ēadgilse*), 2393a (*fēasceaftum*; provided that the adjective in the second element may be taken as substantival); 2411b (*holmwylme*), 2412a; 2678b (*mægenstrengo*), 2679a.

(iii) *Two nouns linked by ond*

In nominative (as subject): 2659b (*sweord ond helm*), 2660a (a parallel in syntax and ultimately in sense).

In accusative (as object): 2369b, 2370a.

(iv) *Noun or pronoun with participle or adjective (or pronoun used adjectivally) as attribute*

In nominative (as subject): 129b, 130a (chiastic); 685b (*wītig God*), 686b; 1111b, 1112a; 1306b (*frōd cyning*), 1307a; 1645a, 1646a (chiastic; the parallel is here in apposition to the subject, *ealdor þegna*, l.1644b, which does not form part of it); 2271a, 2273a; 2413b, 2414a (chiastic).

In nominative (vocatively): 1758b, 1759a.

In accusative (as object): 214b, 215a (chiastic); 231b, 232a (chiastic); 294b, 295 (*nīwtyrwydne nacan*; chiastic); 325b, 326a (chiastic); 520b, 522a (chiastic); 1021a, 1022a (chiastic; the emendation to *hildecumbor*, l.1022a, seems generally accepted); 1358b, 1359a; 1409a, 1411a; 1409b, 1410a (chiastic); 1410a, 1410b; 1488b, 1489a; 1557b, 1558a (chiastic); 1583a (*ōðer swylc*), 1584a (whether or not this may be seen as chiastic depends on which of the two pronouns in the first element is regarded as adjectival); 2253b, 2254a (chiastic); 2456a, 2456b (chiastic); 2517a, 2518a; 2788b, 2789a (chiastic); 2889b, 2890a (chiastic); 3107b, 3108a (chiastic); 3141b, 3142b (chiastic).

In accusative as parallel to the subject accusative element in an accusative and infinitive construction: 222b, 223a (chiastic); 2978a, 2979a (chiastic; the emendation to *brād[ne]* in the first element seems generally accepted).

In accusative as complement to the object of a verb denoting mental action (in this case *tellan*, to reckon): 2641 (*gārwiġend gōde*), 2642a (chiastic).

In dative (as adverb-equivalent): 345a, 346a (chiastic); 1417b (*Denum eallum*), 1419b; 1677b, 1678a; 2102a, 2103a; 2160a (*suna sīnum*), 2161a (chiastic).

(v) *Noun as subject with predicative adjective or participle*

49b (*geōmor sefa*), 50a; 1857a, 1860a (provided that both phrases may be regarded as dependent on *wesan*, l.1859a, as M&R seem to suggest); 2209b (*frōd cyning*), 2210a (Klaeber's translation (p. 208) of the first half-line as 'the king was then old' suggests that the adjective is to be taken as predicative rather than attributive); 2283b (*hord rasod*), 2284a (chiastic).

(vi) *Noun as the object of a verb denoting mental action (in this case witan, to know) with adjective as complement*

1308 (*aldorþegn unlyfigendne*), 1309 (*þone dēorestan dēadne*).

(vii) *Noun qualified by a noun or a pronoun in the genitive case (plural or singular)*

As subject: 1069a, 1069b; 1202b, 1203a; 1283b (*mægþa cræft*), 1284a (chiastic); 1484b, 1485a (*sunu Hræddles*; chiastic); 1550b, 1551b (chiastic); 1866a (*eorla hlēo*), 1867a (chiastic); 1961b, 1962a (chiastic); 2142a (*eorla hlēo*), 2143b (chiastic); 2262b (*hearpan wyn*, here taken as the subject either of *næs* meaning 'was not' (so M&R) or of an understood existential verb with *næs* as negative adverb (so Klaeber and Jack)), 2263a (chiastic); 2316a (*wyrmes wīg*), 2317a (with adjective in genitive used substantivally in the second element); 2325b (*his sylfes hām*), 2327a (chiastic); 2337b, 2338b; 2356a (*Gēata cyning*), 2357a, 2358a (a double parallel, in which the first and second elements on the one hand, and the second and third on the other, are related to one another chiastically); 2401a (*twelfa sum*), 2402a (chiastic); 2428b (*sinca baldor*), 2429a (chiastic); 2602b, 2603b, 2604a (a double parallel, in which the first and second elements on the one hand, and the first and third on the other, are related to one another chiastically). If Klaeber⁶ is right in comparing the construction of this sentence to a common way of introducing characters in Old Norse prose, then the first

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element in the parallel is strictly speaking the subject, the predicate being *Wīglāf*, 1.2602a, which does not participate in the parallel); 2900 (*wilgeofa Wedra lēoda*), 2901a; 2991b, 2992a.

Used predicatively: 178b (*bēaw hyra*), 179a (chiastic; whether the parallel is to be seen as predicative or as the subject of the sentence depends on whether the pronoun *swylc*, 1.178b, is regarded as adjectival or substantival); 454b (*Hrædlan lāf*), 455a.

Vocatively: 427a, 428a; 429b, 430a (chiastic); 1474b, 1476a; 1652b, 1653a.

As subject accusative in an accusative and infinitive construction: 1967b (*eorla hlēo*), 1968a (chiastic).

As logical subject in the accusative in an impersonal construction: 2026b, 2027a (chiastic).

As object: 182a (*heofena Helm*), 183a; 350b (*wine Deniga*), 351a, 352a (a double parallel, in which the first and third element on the one hand, and the second and third on the other, are related to one another chiastically); 443b, 445a (chiastic);⁷ 912b, 913a (chiastic); 1730b, 1731b (chiastic); 1847b, 1849a; 2952 (*Higelāces hilde*), 2953a (with adjective in genitive used substantivally in the second element).

(viii) *Nouns as subject and object (of a verb which does not participate in the parallel)*

652b, 653a (in the first element the pronoun *ōþerne*, here used substantivally, occurs as object).

(ix) *Noun or pronoun as subject with adverb or adverb-equivalent (the latter modifying a verb or adjective which does not participate in the parallel)*

55b (*fæder ellor*), 56a; 264b (*hē on weg*), 265a (provided that the adjective *gamol* in the second element may be regarded as substantival); 2076 (*Hondsciō hil[d]*), 2077a (chiastic).

(x) *Simplex adjective*

Qualifying a noun (which does not participate in the parallel) in the subject accusative in an accusative and infinitive construction: 1662b (*wlitig*), 1663a (*ēacen*).

(xi) *Compound adjective*

Used with reference to the subject (expressed or unexpressed) of the verb *gān* (to go): 640b (*goldhroden*), 641a (*frēolicu*); 3031a (*unblīðe*), 3032a.

Qualifying a noun (which does not participate in the parallel) in the subject accusative in an accusative and infinitive construction: 1586a, 1587a.

(xii) *Two adjectives linked by ond and referring to the subject of a sentence or clause*

Appositively:⁸ 121a, 122a.

Predicatively: 3181, 3182 (Two superlative adjectives, the first of them modified in each element of the parallel by an adverb-equivalent consisting of a plural noun. In the second element this noun is in the dative (of respect) (*lēodum*); in the first it is either in the dative (of respect) also (if Jack's and M&R's reading *mannum* in l. 3181a is accepted) or in the (partitive) genitive (if Klaeber's reading *manna* is preferred).

(xiii) *Superlative adjective used substantivally and qualified by a plural noun in the partitive genitive*

As object: 453a, 454a.

(xiv) *Participle or adjective modified by an adverb or adverb-equivalent, and referring in the nominative to the subject (which does not participate in the parallel) of a sentence or clause, in one or other of the following ways:*

Attributively: 1038a (*searwum fāh*), 1038b.

Appositively: 1332a (*ǣse wlanc*), 1333a; 1450b, 1451a (chiastic); 2746a (*sāre wund*), 2746b.

Predicatively: 903b, 904a; 1438b, 1439a; 1742b (*tō fǣst*), 1743a; 3022b, 3023a (chiastic); 3071b, 3072a, 3072b, 3073a (a triple parallel).

Appositively in relation to an adjective which (does not participate in the parallel and) itself refers predicatively to the subject: 1459b, 1460a (chiastic).⁹

Used semi-substantivally as the subject of a co-ordinate clause, but referring ultimately to the subject of the preceding main clause: 565b, 567a.

(xv) *Transitive finite verb with its subject*

22b (*gewunigen*)-23a, 24a (chiastic; the parallel depends on *lēode* of 1.24a being taken as nom. pl., which is how Klaeber and Jack take it. Both verbs are

transitive, with *hine*, l.22a, which does not participate in the parallel, as the object of the first at least of them, cf. xvi, below).

(xvi) *Transitive finite verb with its object*

22a (*hine*) [. . .] 22b (*gewunigen*), 24a (the parallel depends on *lēode* being taken as dat. sing., which is how M&R take it, rather than as nom. pl., as Klaeber and Jack do, cf. xv, above); 420b (*fife geband*), 421a (chiastic); 422b, 423a (chiastic); 667b, 668b; 1149b, 1150a (chiastic); 1204b, 1205a; 1273b (*þone fēond ofer cwōm*), 1274a (chiastic); 1563a (*gefēng þā fetelhilt*), 1564b (chiastic); 1580a (*Hrōðgāres*)-1581a, 1581b-1582 (semi-chiastic; the verb is modified by an adverb-equivalent in each element, and the object qualified by a genitive noun phrase in each element); 2133a, 2133b, 2134a (a double parallel); 2469a, 2469b; 2747b (*ærwelan*)-2748a, 2748b (*scēawige*)-2749a (chiastic; the object consists of two parallel compound nouns in the first element, cf. section ii, above, and of a compound noun qualified by an adjective in the second element); 3159 (*betifm]bredon on tȳn dagum*)-3160a, 3160b-3161a (chiastic; the verb is modified by an adverb-equivalent in each element, and the object qualified by a genitive noun phrase in each element).

(xvii) *Transitive finite verb with its subject and object*

180b, 181b (chiastic).

(xviii) *Transitive finite verb modified by an adverb or adverb-equivalent*

513b, 514b; 531b, 532a (chiastic); 1158b, 1159a (chiastic); 1452b, 1453a (chiastic); 1716b-1717a, 1717b-1718a (the verb is preceded by two adverbial expressions in each element); 3175b, 3176a.

(xix) *Intransitive finite verb with its subject*

817b, 818a (chiastic); 1120b, 1121a; 1160b, 1161a (chiastic; the adverb *eft* in the first element is not paralleled in the second); 1215a, 1215b (the second element adds between the subject and the verb an adverb-equivalent – *fore þæm werede* – which has no counterpart in the first element but which, however, may be said to assist the parallel semantically, provided that the verb *mapelian* occurring in the first element may reasonably be taken as meaning 'to speak in public'); 1327b (*hnton fēþan*), 1328a (chiastic);¹⁰ 1375b (*lyft drysmab*), 1376a; 1570a, 1570b (*Lixte se lēoma, lēoht inne*

stod; chiasitic); 1615b, 1616a (chiasitic; the adverb *æ̅r* in the first element is not paralleled in the second).

(xx) *Intransitive finite verb with an adjective referring predicatively to the subject (not part of the parallel) of a sentence or clause*

130b, 131a (chiasitic; the first verb, *sæt*, is definitely intransitive; the second, *þolode*, is arguably so in this context); 1754b, 1755a.

(xxi) *Intransitive finite verb modified by adverb or adverb-equivalent*

8a, 8b (chiasitic).

(xxii) *Transitive verb in the infinitive with its subject*

3014b (*brond fretan*), 3015a (the infinitives are dependent on the auxiliary *sceall*, 1.3014b, which does not participate in the parallel, and have as their object the demonstrative pronoun *þā*, 1.3014b, which does not do so either).

(xxiii) *Transitive verb in the infinitive with its direct object*

74b, 76a (provided that both phrases may be taken as depending directly on the verb *gefrægn* of line 74a, a possibility which Klaeber, p. 129, admits. Each phrase may then be seen as forming part of the same accusative and infinitive construction in which the subject accusative is left unexpressed and in which the verb governing the construction (i.e. *gefrægn*, 1.74a) does not participate in the parallel); 1125b, 1126b (infinitive of purpose); 1449 (*meregrundas mengan*), 1450a (chiasitic; the infinitives depend on the auxiliary *scolde*, 1.1449b, which does not participate in the parallel); 1469b, 1470a (the infinitives depend on *ne dorste*, 1.1468b, which does not participate in the parallel); 2045b, 2046a (the infinitives depend on *onginneð*, 1.2044a, which does not participate in the parallel); 2421 (*þone gomelan grētan*), 2422a (chiasitic; the infinitives depend on *sceolde*, 1.2421b, which does not participate in the parallel); 2513b, 2514a (provided that the emendation to *mæ̅rð[u]* in the second element is correct (so Klaeber and Jack; contrast M&R); the infinitives depend on *wylle*, 1.2512b, which does not participate in the parallel); 2770 (*þone grundwong ongitan*), 2771a (provided that the generally accepted emendation to *wræ̅te*, acc. pl. of *wræt*, f., in the second element is correct; the infinitives depend on *meahte* (2770b), which does not participate in the parallel); 3171 ((*care*) *cwīðan*, [*ond*] *kyning mæ̅nan*), 3172 (the *ond* in 1.3171b is

supplied by Klaeber, Jack and M&R for metrical reasons, though its absence from the line is not enough to disqualify the two lines, syntactically, as an example of the parallel; the infinitives depend on *woldon*, 1.3171a, which does not participate in the parallel).

(xxiv) *Transitive verb in the infinitive with its direct object and its accusative subject in an accusative and infinitive construction (the latter dependent on a verb which does not participate in the parallel)*

786, 787b-788a.

(xxv) *Transitive verb in the infinitive with its accusative subject in an accusative and infinitive construction (and governing an object which does not participate in the parallel)*

3132b (*wēg niman*), 3133a (the infinitives depend on *lēton*, 1.3132b, which does not participate in the parallel).

(xxvi) *Transitive verb in the infinitive with noun in the dative as adverb-equivalent (and governing an object which does not participate in the parallel)*

2735 (*gūðwinum grētan*), 2736a (the infinitives depend on *dorste*, 1.2735b, which does not participate in the parallel).

(xxvii) *Verb in the imperative with its direct object*

659a, 659b (chiastic).

(xxviii) *Adverb combined with adverb-equivalent*

542a, 543a (chiastic; comparative adverb in the second element).

(xxix) *Adverb-equivalent (other than the ones noted under sections i, ii, iv, ix, xii, xiv, xvi, xviii, xix, xxi, xxvi, and xxviii, above)*

Preposition (or prepositional phrase) with noun or noun-equivalent: 126a (*on ūhtan*), 126b; 753b (*on mōde*), 754a (*on ferhðe*); 763b (*on weg*), 764a (*on fenhopu*); 859a, 860a (the noun in the second element is qualified by one in the genitive); 1257a (*æfter lāpum*), 1258a; 1704a, 1705a (*ofer þēoda gehwylce*; the noun-equivalent in the second element is qualified by a noun in the genitive); 2261a, 2262a (chiastic; preposition with noun – *æfter wīgfruman* – in the first element, noun with prepositional phrase – *hæledum be healfe* – in the second; the parallel depends on *æfter* being

interpreted as 'along with' (so Klaeber) or '(physically) behind' (so Jack), rather than 'after (the death of)' (so M&R)); 2624b (*of ealdre*), 2625a (*on forðweg*).

Preposition with adjective (or equivalent) and noun: 184a, 185a (in the second element the adjective is paralleled by a noun in the genitive); 395b, 396a (the possessive adjective qualifying the noun in the first element is not paralleled in the second).

(xxx) *Sentence containing a conditional clause, the object of which is modified by a comparative clause*

1822-25, 1826-30a (the object consists of a noun itself modified by an adjective – *mōdlufan māran*, l.1823 – in the first element, and of a noun-clause taking up all of l.1827 in the second. The comparative clauses are introduced by *ðonne*, l.1824b, and *swā*, l. 1828a, in the first and second elements respectively).

This is only the beginning. The next step is to search the remainder of the Old English poetic corpus for examples of the balanced parallel, with a view to finding out, among other things, whether the thirty headings listed here exhaust the various kinds of syntactic context in which this type of parallel may occur. The way will then be open for a search in the corpus for examples of the nine other types of parallel identified by Campbell¹¹ – all of them essentially variations on the balanced one – and for a consideration of how far his account of them needs to be modified and/or developed.

NOTES

¹ Alistair Campbell, 'The Old English Epic Style', in *English and Medieval Studies: Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. by Norman Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London: Allen & Unwin, 1962), pp. 13-26 (p. 20).

² *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by Fr. Klaeber, 3rd edn (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1950).

³ *Beowulf: A Student Edition*, ed. by George Jack (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994; repr. 1997).

⁴ *Beowulf: An Edition with Relevant Shorter Texts*, ed. by Bruce Mitchell and Fred. C. Robinson, rev. edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

⁵ See Bruce Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 1, 65, § 134.

⁶ Klaeber, p. ci, n. 5.

⁷ For various possible ways of reading the second element, see Klaeber, p. 144 and Jack, with references.

⁸ See Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 1, 63 §130.

⁹ See Klaeber's note, pp. 185-86, for a cautious acknowledgement of closeness in meaning between the two elements.

¹⁰ The parallel depends on the verb *cnysedan* in the second element being taken as intransitive, which is how Dorothy Whitelock takes it in her *Glossary to Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, rev. by Dorothy Whitelock, 15th edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

¹¹ Campbell, pp. 20-22.