Beowulf 1563a and Blissian Metrics

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A. J. Bliss, in his authoritative and influential monograph on *The Metre of Beowulf* (1967), analysed l. 1563a, *hē ġefēng þā fetelhilt*, as a member of his group (4) of verses beginning with finite verbs. In verses of that group, in which the verb is the last particle before the first stressed element, alliterating finite verbs are thought to be an integral part of the alliterative scheme of the line and hence to be metrically stressed. This means that, according to Bliss, l. 1563a is a Type 1A2a with *hē* and *ġe-* in anacrusis. This analysis is compatible with Bliss's definition of anacrusis, according to which any two unstressed syllables can be in the extrametrical prelude to a verse. As this essay shows, however, personal pronouns are not normally found in anacrustic positions in the poem, and so it appears reasonable to believe that seemingly anacrustic *hē* is not part of the authorial reading, but a result of scribal misapprehension of the text in the exemplar. After considering several possibilities and solutions, this article proposes cancellation of *hē* on the grounds that the scribe found the absence of a pronominal subject at that point confusing, and so decided to supply one to make the syntax of the passage closer to the syntax of late Old English verse. Emendation to *ġefēng þā fetelhilt* does not change Bliss's analysis of l. 1563a as a Type 1A2a, but it does mean that that verse should be considered a member not of group (4), but of group (3): the verb is the only particle before the first stressed element. The essay concludes by reminding readers of Bliss's monograph that his definition of anacrusis can be accepted as long as pronouns and linguistic elements other than verbal prefixes and proclitic *ne* are excluded from the definition.
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First published in 1958, *The Metre of Beowulf* by A. J. Bliss remains an authoritative and influential work, and an essential reference for anyone with a serious interest in Old English poetry. This is justly so. The book is packed with statistical information about the incidence and distribution of half-lines in the poem, and nearly every claim there made has a firm empirical basis. As C. L. Wrenn said, 'The statistical tables alone, which document the whole, would in themselves make the book rewarding and permanently valuable' (1960, 414). And as E. G. Stanley put it: 'There are far more new facts in the book than anyone could have thought possible at this stage. The statistical analysis is of the greatest importance, and its application almost always convincing' (1963, 53). Nothing, therefore, in Bliss's monograph ought to be taken lightly, and doubts about the validity of his analysis should always be raised with due caution and respect.[1]

   One of the most interesting parts of the book is Chapter Two, on '"Light", "Normal" and "Heavy" Verses'. In it, Bliss endeavoured to ascertain whether an alliterating finite verb not preceded by a stressed element within the verse receives a metrical stress. The metrical behaviour of such verbs is ambiguous because their alliteration seems to suggest that they are stressed, but they ought to be unstressed by virtue of their position at the head of the verse clause (as mandated by Kuhn's Law of Sentence Particles).[2] To find a solution to this

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1   Some of Bliss's conclusions had of course been anticipated in German scholarship, as he himself acknowledges in the preface to his book (1967, v). A work of relevance is Erich Neuner's doctoral dissertation (1920). For a biographical account of Bliss, see Lucas (2022).

2   Words in Old English poetry are normally classified into three categories: stressed words, proclitics, and particles. Stressed words, which comprise nouns and adjectives (including infinitives and participles), always receive stress regardless of their position within the clause. Proclitics include prepositions, demonstratives, possessives, and other words that depend upon the following word. They are normally unstressed except when postponed from their position before the word on which they are dependent. Finally, particles, which comprise finite verbs, personal and demonstrative pronouns, and many adverbs, are independent words which do not carry as much meaning as stressed words. Whether particles are stressed or not will depend on their position within the verse clause. According to Kuhn's Law of Sentence Particles, or *Satzpartikelgesetz*, particles which are placed in the verse's clause-initial drop are unstressed, while those displaced from that position will normally receive a metrical stress. In the verse clause in ll. 4–5, *Oft Scyld Scēfing | sceaþena þrēatum, | monegum mǣġþum | meodosetla oftēah* (which contains two particles, *oft* and *oftēah*), for example, the monosyllabic adverb *oft* is in the initial drop of the clause and is therefore unstressed (l. 4a is a Sieversian Type C: x / / x); the finite verb *oftēah* appears outside that drop and so it receives

problem, he analysed all the verses in *Beowulf* that begin with an independent finite verb, regardless of whether it alliterates, and divided them into nine groups depending on the verb's position in the clause. Group (4), of which there are 75 examples, according to Bliss's count, comprises all those verses in the poem in which the verb is the last particle before the first stressed element. Here are a couple of unambiguous examples:

> Hī hyne þā ætbǣron   tō brimes faroðe (28)
> Ne sorga, snotor guma (1384a)

The first stressed element of the clause that starts at 28a is *brimes*, and the finite verb, *ætbǣron*, is the last particle in a series of four. L. 1384a contains a whole clause, of which the first stressed element is *snotor*, and the finite verb *sorga* is the last particle of two before it. In all but two of the verses within this group in *Beowulf*, the finite verb alliterates, and so it is reasonable to conclude with Bliss 'that when a finite is the last of a number of particles before the first stressed element it is normally assimilated to the stressed elements and treated as such' (1967, 14).

This essay is not concerned with the validity of Bliss's conclusions about metrical stress in this group (which it does not question) or with the two exceptional verses in which the verb fails to alliterate.[3] The focus of the piece is rather on l. 1563a, a member of the group in which the verb regularly alliterates, as expected:

> Hē ġefēng þā fetelhilt

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a metrical stress (l. 5b is a Sieversian Type E: / \ xx /). For the original formulation of the law, see Kuhn (1933). For summaries of Kuhn's Law of Sentence Particles, see Campbell (1970, 94); Lucas (1990, 294); Kendall (1991, 17–18); Hutcheson (1992, 129); Momma (1997, 56–64); Orton (1999, 289 n. 11). On the law's empirical validity, see Donoghue (1997). Terasawa (2011) furnishes a good introduction to the principles of Old English versification. A glossary of metrical terms can be found in Pascual (2022). Unless otherwise stated, *Beowulf* is cited from Klaeber's fourth edition (henceforward referred to as *Klaeber IV*: see Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008).

3   The two exceptional verses are 1600a, *Ðā cōm nōn dæġes*, and 1727b, *hē āh ealra ġeweald*. Finite verbs of motion are often used like auxiliaries in conjunction with uninflected infinitives (see, for example, Pascual, 2021). There is in the context of 1600a no uninflected infinitive, but auxiliary use for *cōm* on an analogical basis is not inconceivable. In 1727b, the vowel of the pronoun was perhaps elided before the vowel of the verb, which might have prevented the alliteration (see Pascual, 2015, 178, n. 34).

As can be seen, the finite verb *ġefēng* is preceded by pronominal *hē* (an obvious particle) and followed by *þā*, a particle only if construed as an adverb meaning 'then'. Bliss's inclusion of l. 1563a in group (4) must therefore mean that he understood *þā* as the accusative form of the demonstrative, and hence as proclitic to feminine *fetelhilt*,[4] since only thus can *ġefēng* be the last rather than the last particle but one before the stressed element. Moreover, because the extremely frequent alliteration of the verbs in this group shows them to be stressed, Bliss naturally assigns stress to *-fēng*, and so he analyses the half-line as 1A2a (or Type A2b in Sievers's system), with *hē* and *ġe-* necessarily in anacrusis.

Bliss's scansion of 1563a as Type 1A2a with a disyllabic extrametrical prelude is of course compatible with his definition of anacrusis:

> The types of verse which begin with a stressed syllable (Types A and D; it is doubtful whether Type E should be included here) may occasionally be preceded by one, or exceptionally two unstressed syllables; this extrametrical prelude to the verse is known as anacrusis or *Auftakt* (1967, 40).

The analysis of pronominal *hē* as an anacrustic syllable, however, is problematic. There are, according to my count, 47 unambiguous instances of normal on-verses with anacrusis in *Beowulf*.[5] In all but three of these verses, the syllables in anacrusis are either verbal prefixes or the negative proclitic *ne*. Here are a few representative examples:

> ġesette siġehrēþiġ (94a)
> Ārīs, rīċes weard (1390a)
> forsiteð ond forsworceð (1767a)
> ne sōhte searonīðas (2738a)

The two exceptional verses are worth considering:

> ġē æt hām ġē on herġe (1248a)
> wið ord ond wið ecge (1549a)

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4 The noun *hilt* belongs etymologically to the class of *-es*, *-os*-stems, but it is normally declined analogically like a neuter *a*-stem. Its gender can fluctuate between feminine (as here) and neuter. See Campbell (1959, §636). On change of class and gender in nouns, see Mitchell (1985, 62).

5 94a, 141a, 409a, 501a, 505a, 772a, 827a, 1108a, 1150a, 1151a, 1169a, 1248a, 1274a, 1304a, 1384a, 1390a, 1451a, 1453a, 1460a, 1485a, 1549a, 1554a, 1610a, 1616a, 1622a, 1667a, 1724a, 1751a, 1767a, 1837a, 2252a, 2284a, 2455a, 2525a, 2591a, 2629a, 2659a, 2681a, 2703a, 2705a, 2717a, 2738a, 2769a, 2878a, 2930a, 3062a, 3121a.

Here we can see a conjunction plus a preposition (1248a) and just a preposition (1549a) in anacrusis. What these two exceptions have in common is that the elements in anacrusis take part in correlative structures (*ġē … ġē*, *wið … wið*). Correlative constructions are syntactically cumbersome and hence difficult to handle, and so it makes sense for them to receive special treatment.

Here are the three on-verses excluded from my count of instances of anacrusis as they are edited in *Klaeber IV*:

> in mǣ̆ġþa ġehwǣre (25a)
> in Cāines cynne (107a)
> Tō lang is tō reċċenne (2093a)

These are doubtful for various reasons. L. 107a has double alliteration, as one would expect from a verse featuring anacrusis. The first breath-group, however, is as long as the second, but in verses with anacrusis the first breath-group is systematically shorter.[6] Moreover, *caines* in the manuscript is a scribal alteration of older *cames*, and so this seems to be originally intended as a reference to Cham, not Cain (two characters that were often conflated in early medieval texts).[7] The verse would then be a regular Type C with resolution of the first lift (*in Cames cynne*), not a Type A with prepositional anacrusis. In 25a, a scribe appears to have substituted the analogical Late West Saxon feminine form *ġehwǣre* for the older and genderless *ġehwǣm* to make it agree in gender with *mǣ̆ġþa* (cf. 1365a, *Þǣr mæġ nihta ġehwǣm*, in which feminine *nihta* depends on *ġehwǣm*, not *ġehwǣre*).[8] Restoration of *ġehwǣm* gives a regular verse of Type B with no anacrusis. It is more difficult to see what lies behind the reading at 2093a, but the absence of double alliteration suggests that it has somehow been tampered with.[9] None of these was accepted by Bliss as a genuine instance of anacrusis.[10]

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6   For a definition of the breath group and its bearing on anacrusis, see Bliss, (1967, 36–43).
7   For discussion, see the note on ll. 106–108 in the commentary of *Klaeber IV* (123) and Neidorf (2017, 93–96).
8   See the note on l. 25 in the commentary of *Klaeber IV* and Pascual (2019, 209).
9   Alternatively, the construction with *tō lang* might have been treated exceptionally (cf. *The Battle of Maldon* 66b, in which *tō* before *lang* also seems to be anacrustic).
10 Bliss also rejected two other verses edited as containing anacrusis in the third of edition of Klaeber's *Beowulf* (the one that he used): 414a, *under heofenes hādor*; and 1068a, [*be*] *Finnes eaferum*. In 414a, substitution of metrically monosyllabic *haðor* ('confinement') for disyllabic *hādor* ('brightness') improves both sense and metre. Anacrustic *be* in 1068a is an editorial addition, and so it can hardly be considered authentic. The editors of *Klaeber IV* read *Finnes eaferan*, i.e. they emend the dative form in the manuscript to accusative *eaferan* (the abbreviations

Anacrusis is rarer in the off-verse. Here are the seven unambiguous instances that occur in the poem:[11]

swā wæter bebūgeð (93b)
swā guman ġefrungon (666b)
swā sǣ bebūgeð (1223b)
ðurhfōn ne mihte (1504b)
ġesacan ne tealde (1773b)
forberan ne mehte (1877b)
nū hæleð ne m(ō)stan (2247b)

As can be seen, only three appear to have prefixes in anacrusis. The seemingly anacrustic position in the other four is occupied by particles (conjunctive *swā* and the adverb *nū*). The situation is obviously very different from that in the on-verse, where the extrametrical position at the beginning is almost always occupied by prefixes or the negative proclitic *ne*.[12] Double alliteration, moreover, is naturally absent from all these verses, being as they are in the second half of the line. The observation of this imbalance led Daniel Donoghue to redefine the Blissian notion of anacrusis in an important essay published less than two years after Bliss's death:

> The extrametrical syllable is an unstressed prefix or a proclitic, each dependent on the following stress-word. In the a-verse anacrusis is limited to the first foot of metrical Types 1A, 1A*, 1D and 1D*, where the second breath-group is longer than the first, and alliteration is mandatory. An altogether different set of rules obtains in the b-verse, where double alliteration is impossible. Anacrusis is limited to Type C verses and the extrametrical syllable comes between the two stressed syllables. (1987, 4)

-*ā* and -*ū* for respectively -*an* and -*um* are often confused). For details, see the editors' note for that verse in their commentary.

11 I have excluded ll. 9b, *þāra ymbsittendra*, and ll. 2592b, *hȳ eft ġemētton*, from consideration. Demonstrative *þāra* is cancelled in the third edition of Klaeber's *Beowulf*, not only because its metre is anomalous, but also because the syntactic context is not one that demands definite usage, and unnecessary demonstratives are as a rule avoided by the poet. The editors of *Klaeber IV* have *þāra* underdotted. The pronoun *hȳ* in 2592b ought to be stressed because it is displaced from the clausal onset, which is in l. 2592a (*þæt ðā*), but stress on *hȳ* would yield an aberrant metrical pattern. It is likely a scribal addition motivated by reciprocal use of *ġemētan*, which is frequent (see the note on the line in *Klaeber IV*).

12 The only exceptions are the two on-verses with correlative constructions (1248a and 1549a).

Thus, according to Donoghue's redefinition, only unstressed prefixes and proclitic *ne* can really be involved in extrametricality (which in the second half of the line is to be found in the middle of the verse, not at its beginning).[13]

It should be clear, then, that Bliss's analysis of l. 1563a, *hē ġefēng þā fetelhilt*, as a verse featuring disyllabic anacrusis is to be corrected, since personal pronouns like *hē* are not normally found in the extrametrical prelude of the on-verse. If *þā* is construed adverbially, then *ġefēng* would be the last particle but one before the first stressed element, and so l. 1563a would belong to group (5) instead of group (4). There are in *Beowulf* 105 instances of group (5), of which the finite verb alliterates in only 57. This made Bliss conclude that, unless absolutely demanded by the metre, finite verbs in verses of group (5) are metrically unstressed (and the alliteration, when it happens, is non-functional or ornamental). This means that, if l. 1563a is reclassified as a member of group (5), *ġefēng*, though alliterating, would be unstressed, and anacrusis would therefore be out of the question. The verse would then have to be scanned not as a Type 1A2a, but as an a2d Type (or Type A3b in Sieversian notation).[14]

I believe, however, that *þā* is here likelier to be a demonstrative than an adverb. L. 1563a occurs right after a passage of six lines (1557–1562) which the poet has devoted to describing the gigantic sword found by the hero in the Grendels' underwater hall. The context, therefore, seems to be one of definiteness: Beowulf took the hilt not of any sword, but of the one just described.[15] If l. 1563a is not a member of group (5), but what, then, are we to make of initial *hē*? There are two possibilities. One is to consider that it was originally placed after *ġefēng* in the exemplar, and that the scribe copied it in the wrong place. This is suggested by verses like the following, in which a pronominal subject follows a clause-initial finite verb:

> Habbað wē tō þǣm mǣran (270a)
> cūþe hē duguðe þēaw (359b)
> Wuna(ð) hē on wiste (1735a)
> wisse hē ġearwe (2339b, 2725b)
> Ġebīde ġē on beorge (2529a)

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13 On the limitation of anacrusis to verbal prefixes and *ne* see Kuhn (1933, 16), Cable (1974, Chapter 3), and Hutcheson (1995, 102–104).

14 Interestingly, A3 is the scansion assigned to this verse by Calvin B. Kendall (1991, 272), though he does not mention the inadequacy of Bliss's classification of the half-line as a member of group (5).

15 On this point, see Quirk and Wrenn (1955, §117). Definiteness in *Beowulf*, of course, does not necessarily require the demonstrative, but it seems to me that use of the demonstrative at this point is natural.

None of these, however, is particularly close to l. 1563a. In 359b, 2339b, and 2725b, *hē* follows the verb, but the syntax of the off-verse is different from that of the on-verse.[16] The other three are on-verses, but the finite verbs are not in the preterite and two of the pronouns (*wē* and *ġē*) are not third person.[17] Inversion of subject and verb seems to be more common with the first-person singular pronoun, as in the following examples:

> Wēn' iċ þæt ġē for wlenċo (338a)
> sende iċ Wylfingum (471a)
> Secge iċ þē tō sōðe (590a)
> Wēne iċ þæt hē mid gōde (1184a)
> Hȳrde iċ þæt þām frætwum (2163a)
> Hȳrde iċ þæt hē ðone healsbēah (2172a)

Both present and preterite forms are found in this group. What they have in common is that they all end in vowels, and of the six nominative personal pronouns available in the language, only one, *iċ*, begins with a vowel. A study of elision in Old English poetry is beyond the scope of this essay, but the evidence here presented seems to suggest that the verb's vocalic ending was elided and *iċ* subsequently became absorbed into the preceding finite verb through enclisis.[18] This analysis seems to receive support from l. 1997b, *Gode iċ þanc secge*, in which postponed *iċ* is metrically attached to the preceding word.[19] Thus, it is the possibility of enclisis that appears to have favoured the postposition of *iċ* against that of all the other nominative pronouns.

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16 Bliss (1967, 45) thinks that there is elision of verb-final *-e* before *hē* in 2339b and 2725b. If so, *hē* would be enclitic to stressed *wisse* and the verse's internal caesura would fall right before *ġearwe*. Bliss did not consider elision of verb-final *-e* in 359b because *cūþe* is unstressed and so postverbal *hē* poses no metrical problems, but it might well be the case that *hē* in this half-line was likewise enclitic to the immediately preceding finite verb (hence the postposition of the pronoun). This point is discussed next in the essay. See also Lucas (1987, 150–152).

17 2529a is imperative, and so inversion of subject and verb is of course to be expected.

18 Other verses from *Beowulf* in which *iċ* is postverbal: 344a, 408b, 433a, 442a, 487b, 525a, 960b. In all of these, the verbs end in a vowel. There are instances in which postverbal *iċ* is preceded by a finite verb that ends in a consonant (1011a, 1027a, 2014b, 2141b, 2145a, 2432a, 2801b), but these are all negative constructions, and so the normal order is verb-subject (this is discussed next in the essay).

19 The sequence *Gode iċ* undergoes resolution (the alliteration is on *g*). The noun *þanc* is prosodically subordinate to the preceding word, and so it receives secondary stress. The verse is a Type A2a in Sieversian terms (or a Type 2A3a according to Blissian metrics).

Pronominal subjects are frequently found after the verb in negative constructions, where a verb-subject order is of course to be expected. Here are some examples:

ne ġefeah hē þǣre fǣhþe (109a)
Nāt hē þāra gōda (681a)
Ne ġefræġn iċ þā mǣġþe (1011a)
Ne nōm hē in þǣm wīcum (1612a)
ne ġewēox hē him tō willan (1711a)
Ne hēdde hē þæs heafolan (2697a)

L. 1563a has a clause-initial finite verb in the preterite, a third-person singular pronominal subject, and is not a negative construction, and so inversion of pronoun and subject does not appear the best course of action.

A preferable solution will present itself upon consideration of on-verses like the following, all of which begin with clause-initial third-person singular finite verbs in the preterite:

Ġewāt ðā nēosian (115a)
Forġeaf þā Bēowulfe (1020a)
Ġefēng þā be [f]eax[e] (1537a)[20]
stonc ðā æfter stāne (2288a)
Ārās ðā bī ronde (2538a)

As can be seen, none of them starts with a pronominal subject, but they are otherwise very close to l. 1563a (note especially l. 1537a). They all occur after a strong pause (i.e. a colon or a semicolon in *Klaeber IV*), and all of them contain stressed words, none of which is in the nominative (if the verse contained a nominal subject, then use of a personal pronoun in the nominative would not be a possibility). Like *ġefēng* in 1563a, moreover, each of the verbs in these examples has a subject that is not the same as the subject of the immediately preceding clause. The subject of *ġefēng* in 1563a (in addition to *hē*, of course) is *freca Scyldinga* (1563b), in reference to Beowulf. In the preceding sentence, there are two subjects, none of which is Beowulf: one is *hit* (1560a), in reference to the

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20 This verse is cited from George Jack's edition (1994), since the editors of *Klaeber IV* retain manuscript *eaxle*. The manuscript reading is very likely scribal rather than authorial, and it is emended to *feaxe* by a large number of editors (see the critical apparatus in *Klaeber IV*). Even if the manuscript reading is retained, however, the verse remains equally valid for the purposes of my argumentation.

gigantic sword, and the other is *æniġ mon ōðer* (1560b). The implied subjects of
ġewāt (115a), *forġeaf* (1020a), and *stonc* (2288a) are Grendel, Hrothgar, and the
dragon, while the subjects of the preceding clauses are, respectively, pronominal
hē (in reference to God), *Þēod-Scyldingas*, and *wrōht*. The subjects of *ġefēng* in
1537a and *ārās* in 2538a are *Gūð-Ġēata lēod* (1538a) and *rōf ōretta* (2538b),
whereas the subjects of the preceding clauses are, respectively, *hē* in 1535a (in
reference to the generic *man* of 1534b) and *gūð* in 2536b. Both *Gūð-Ġēata lēod*
and *rōf ōretta* are therefore explicit subjects (each appears in the same clause as
its verb), but they are in different verses. This means that the finite verbs could
have conceivably been accompanied by proleptic pronominal subjects, of which
the phrases in 1538a and 2538b would then be appositive nominal expansions
(as can in fact be observed in different syntactic contexts, such as ll. 28–29,
618b–19, 2089–90, and 2385–86).

In all the examples above, then, a third-person singular pronominal subject
was omitted, even though the omitted subject was not the same as the subject of
the immediately preceding clause. Many more examples of similar omissions can
easily be found if the condition that the verse must appear after a strong pause
and/or the condition that the subject of the finite verb must be different from the
subject of the preceding clause are ignored. Here are a few:

> Hwearf þā hrǣdlīċe (356a)
> onband beadurūne (501a)
> Ġehwearf þā in Francna fæþm (1210a)
> Ēode þā tō setle (1232a)
> Ofsæt þā þone seleġyst (1545a)
> sǣlde tō sande (1917a)
> Oferswam ðā sioleða bigong (2367a)
> ġeald þone gūðrǣs (2991a)
> hēold on hēahġesceap (3084a)

These are all on-verses, and the verbs are third-person singular finite forms in the
preterite. But regardless of tense, number, and location within the line, omission
of the pronominal subject appears to be the norm with clause-initial preterite
finite verbs in verses that also contain at least one stressed word.[21]

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21 Excluding of course the few pronominal inversions discussed above. One obvious exception
    to the tendency is l. 1727b, *hē āh ealra ġeweald*. Pronominal *hē* refers to God, who is the
    subject of the preceding clause. The verse is in the second half-line, however, and there
    might be elision between *hē* and *āh*. Regardless of what motivated use of the pronoun in
    this example, the tendency for pronominal subjects to be omitted before clause-initial
    finite verbs in verses that also contain at least one stressed word is obvious. I have likewise

The situation with verses that do not contain stressed words (also known as particle verses) is different. In particle verses, finite verbs are stressed and tend not to appear at the beginning of the half-line.[22] Think, for example, of 28a, *Hī hyne þā æthǣron* (a Sieversian Type A3 with stress on *-bǣ-*), and 417b, *þæt iċ þē sōhte* (a Type C1 with stress on *þē*). The movement of the finite verb towards the middle or, more commonly, the end of the particle verse means that an empty space is made at the verse's beginning, and this space is often occupied, quite naturally, by pronominal subjects. Thus, verses like 740a, *ac hē ġefēng hraðe*, and 748b, *hē onfēng hraðe*, are, despite their superficial resemblance to *hē ġefēng þā fetelhilt*, metrically and syntactically different from it. In 740a and 748b, the displacement of the verb to a position of stress in the right part of the verse meant that prefixes like *ġe-* and *on-* could easily be confused with anacrusis.[23] Inclusion of pronominal *hē* ensured that the onset of the verse was correctly construed as a non-anacrustic drop. On the other hand, in verses consisting of a clause-initial finite verb followed by a stressed word, there was little room for more particles at the beginning. Pronominal subjects would have made the beginning of the verse too heavy, and so they tended to be omitted.

In the light of these considerations, it is reasonable to assume that *hē* in 1563a is scribal, not authorial. If *hē* is deleted, this is how the verse clause would look like:

Ġefēng þā fetelhilt   freca Scyldinga,
hrēoh ond heorogrim

The nominal phrase *freca Scyldinga* would then be the only subject of *ġefēng* rather than an expansion of *hē*, and the clause would thus closely resemble other clauses in the poem like the following (mentioned above):

Ārās ðā bī ronde   rōf ōretta,
heard under helme (2538–2539a)

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excluded auxiliaries from analysis, as they are metrically different from independent verbs (see Bliss, 1967, 21–23).

22 For my discussion of particle verses I am indebted to R. D. Fulk's excellent analysis (2016).

23 Fulk (2016, 25). On the tendency of Old English poets to avoid structural ambiguity in verse, see Russom (1987, passim). Both 740a and 748b are Sieversian Type C3 verses, in which resolution of *hraðe* is suspended on account of the presence of an immediately preceding non-resolved lift (*-fēng*). Bliss analyses them as 2C2c and 2C2b. The difference between them is non-structural (740a has three unstressed syllables before the first lift while 748b has only two).

Here, the nominal phrase *rōf ōretta* is the subject of the finite verb at the head of the preceding verse, which lacks a pronominal subject, and as in 1563–1564a, the following half-line varies the subject of the verb.

Editors of the poem will be likelier to accept the emendation here proposed if a rationale is given for the scribal insertion of *hē* at 1563a, and I think that one can easily be found. Omission of pronominal subjects before clause-initial finite verbs in verses that contain stressed words appears to have been the norm only in classically composed poetry like *Beowulf*. In late poems like *The Battle of Maldon*, however, the situation was different, as the following verses will demonstrate:[24]

> he let him þa of handon (7a, with *l* alliteration)
> he lihte þa mid leodon (23a)
> he sceaf þa mid ðam scylde (136a)
> he wolde þæs beornes (160a)
> He gehleop þone eoh (189a)
> He bræc þone bordweall (277a)

These are all comparable to *hē ġefēng þā fetelhilt*, especially l. 277a, in which a transitive finite verb in the preterite is followed by an accusative noun phrase consisting of a demonstrative and a compound. These verses suggest that the *Beowulf* scribe, for whom the versification style of a work like *The Battle of Maldon* was probably more familiar than that of the earlier epic, was confused by the lack of a pronominal subject in 1563a (perhaps because he found the change of subject between 1562 and 1563 too abrupt), and decided to supply one, thereby generating an anomalous instance of anacrusis.[25] There is evidence

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24 *The Battle of Maldon* is cited from Mark Griffith's forthcoming edition of the poem (which contains a discussion of the syntax and metrical grammar of verses like the ones listed above).

25 An early date of composition for *Beowulf* is here assumed. For discussion, see, for example, Fulk (1992), Neidorf (2013–2014 and 2017), and Neidorf and Pascual (2019). A different possibility, suggested to me by Mark Griffith, is that the verse originally read *hē ġefēng þā fetel*, i.e. 'he then seized the strap', a light verse whose only lift, *fetel*, is a noun possibly of masculine gender (there are only three examples in the language, according to the *Dictionary of Old English*, and these do not allow gender to be assigned, but the Old High German and Old Norse cognates are masculine). This means that *þā* would then unambiguously be an adverb. A scribe confused by the rare word *fetel* would have attempted clarifying it by adding *hilt*, thereby giving rise to irregular anacrusis. This analysis solves the semantic problem posed by the compound *fetelhilt* (on which see the note on this verse in the commentary of *Klaeber IV*). The hypothetical *hē ġefēng þā fetel* would then be a Type e (or Sieversian B3), a verse pattern whose existence is debated. Bliss counted seven examples in the poem (262a, 459a, 779a, 1514a, 1728a, 2048a, and 3027a), but

elsewhere in the poem for scribal insertion of personal pronouns. In line 2592b, for example, *hȳ* was interpolated, even though it spoiled the metre, because the scribe misconstrued *ġemētton* as reciprocal (as discussed in footnote 11 above). In 274b, failure to take *nāthwylċ* as a negative indefinite pronoun resulted in scribal insertion of *iċ*, which strains the metre.[26]

It is therefore reasonable for future editors of *Beowulf* to consider cancelling *hē* in l. 1563a (to the best of my knowledge, the only edition in which *hē* has been removed from the text is the one forthcoming from Andy Orchard).[27] Deletion of *hē* does not alter Bliss's scansion of the verse as 1A2a,[28] but it does mean that 1563a should be transferred from group (4) to group (3), in which the finite verb is the only particle before the first stressed word. There are, then, 84 instances in group (3) and 74 in group (4). An anomaly is also thus removed: the particle *hē* was deemed significant for the purposes of the verse's classification in group (4) while it was simultaneously regarded as outside the metrical scheme of that same verse. And, to conclude, users of Bliss's monograph should bear in mind that his definition of anacrusis in *Beowulf* can be accepted with the proviso that it involves only prefixes and proclitic *ne* (a conclusion of which, I hope, Bliss himself would approve were he alive today).

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he simultaneously doubted its existence (1967, 61, and see Pope 2001, 145). The pattern seems to occur only in the on-verse, and it is particularly frequent in *The Metrical Psalms* and *The Metres of Boethius*: for discussion of Type e in the latter work, see Griffith's chapter on the composition of the metres in Godden and Irvine (2009, 120–121). If the type is authentic in *Beowulf*, then Griffith's proposed solution is indeed very appealing, and the narrative sequence would then make a lot of sense: the hero first took the strap, then drew the sword (l. 1564b, *hrinġmǣl ġebrǣġd*). I would like to express my gratitude to Mark for his useful and insightful comments on an initial draft of this essay.

26 The interpolation here proposed is compatible with the behaviour of both *Beowulf* scribes, on which see Neidorf (2017). See also Pascual (2013–2014 and 2017). Addition of *wē* before finite *sculon* in *Cædmon's Hymn* 1a is also very close to the proposed interpolation of *hē* before *ġefēng*.

27 A possibility to which I gave serious thought only after finishing the first draft of this piece is that the scribe's exemplar contained both the adverb and the feminine demonstrative in the accusative singular (cf. *Beowulf* 2606a, *Ġemunde ðā ðā āre*). The scribe might then have failed to copy one of the two identical forms. Both *hē ġefēng þā þā fetelhilt* and *ġefēng þā þā fetelhilt* would belong to Bliss's group (5) and would scan as light verses (a2e and a2d, respectively). Regardless of whether the scribe failed to copy one of two consecutive *þā*-forms, preverbal *hē* in a verse beginning with a clause-initial finite verb and containing a stressed word remains syntactically anomalous.

28 If *þā* is construed adverbially, however, then the scansion of the verse changes to Sieversian A3 or Blissian a2c. Pronominal subjects are often omitted before clause-initial finite verbs at the beginning of verses that also contain stressed words, as discussed above, and so cancellation of *hē* seems advisable even if *þā* is considered an adverb. L. 1563a would then belong to Blissian group (5): the verb is the last particle but one before the first stressed element.

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