LITERATURE

THE STYLE OF *BEOWULF*: A STUDY OF DICTION AND RHETORICAL DEVICES

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It is sound to maintain that what really enchants the serious reader of *Beowulf* in the main is *not* what its author tells. The actual source for enchantment and joy is indeed not the very subject matter, nor is it the style *per se* but the way the poet handles stylistic devices to synthesize his material in an appealing manner, through which the audience's sense and sensibility are gratified. To hunt for extrinsic elements in *Beowulf* or biographical aids in the life of its unknown author is to present a case which would be quite embarrassing for historical critics. To dwell upon *Beowulf's* intrinsic stylistic features *per se*, on the other hand is a mechanical and futile exercise. It should be more profitable, then, in terms of manner and matter to view *Beowulf* as a poetic whole and within its context, to examine certain prominent stylistic characteristics. This examination will be confined to the diction and to the rhetorical artifice the poet employs. The purpose of the examination is to throw an interpretive light on *Beowulf* as an artistic work and to demonstrate the poetic power in the hands of its "maker", the professional scop, entertaining his sophisticated audience.

C. C. Batchelor's study of the style of *Beowulf* is a good example of interesting but dangerous criticism. Batchelor accumulates several words under categories that express what he considers as Christian concepts. Thus, he introduces "Terms of Christian solicitude, brotherly love...," and "Terms expressing love of light, hate of darkness..." and "Terms expressing wretchedness and happiness...,"(Batchelor 1937:336). Batchelor points out certain words to illustrate those classified terms. This labor is undertaken in order to arrive at the following conclusion:

> The conviction has grown with each review of the poem which I have made that it is almost entirely Christian; and that the purely pagan sections are a rather small minority. The moral of the poem—for we must call it that—is that Beowulf deeply impressed all whom he met, even the truculent Unferth, as being the kindest and mildest of chieftains. That is a Christian ideal (Batchelor 1937:340).[1]

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[1] The examples Batchelor chooses in order to express Christian concepts do not constitute an adequate and valid evidence for his sweeping conclusion. What he terms as

That Batchelor's conclusion is partial and invalid becomes more obvious by seeing the partiality and invalidity of his premises and assumptions. To categorize words in terms of concepts and to label such concepts as being Christian, or only Christian, is the ultimate source of double danger.

William Whallon's treatment of diction in *Beowulf* results in perhaps less confusion. Yet, Whallon, too, develops a notion of diction that is in harmony only with his concept of formulaic language. In his article entitled "The diction of *Beowulf*", Whallon makes the following point, which is in effect the gist of his argument:

> The poetic language [of *Beowulf*] does not manifest a number of kennings used for the hero in all possible situations, time after time, to the exclusion of every prosodic alternative. The fraction of dispensable synonyms is not very minor, as in the Homeric poems, but major. The difference is decisive and vital: the language of *Beowulf* lacks the economy expected from a formulaic language that is highly developed (1961:318).[2]

The claim that *Beowulf* "lacks the economy expected from a formulaic language" implies, of course, that *Beowulf*'s language is formulaic and this language has to be endowed with "economy". And, then, many important questions arise. Is *Beowulf*'s language strictly formulaic? Is the *Beowulf* poet simply and mechanically setting up a chain of formulae? Undoubtedly, "economy" is a merit. But should one use it as a criterion even when an epic is under question? If these questions are to be answered rightly, one has to adopt a comprehensive view of the language of *Beowulf* which would not dismiss other and more important aspects of that language. Donald K. Fry rightly suggests that "The factor Whallon has consistently ignored in applying the concept of thrift to *Beowulf* is the device of variation" (1968:355). Fry reasons persuasively that "As long as poets used the device of variation, thrift was impossible. Therefore, the concept of economy is not applicable to Old English poetry"

Christian virtues are undoubtedly Christian. What he has ignored, though, is the possibility of finding these concepts in the poet's pre-Christian culture and tradition, let alone the fact that such virtues and ideals as mentioned by the author do exist in some other religions, of which I am sure Islam is one. When the notorious and intriguing question of the so-called "Christian and pagan elements" in *Beowulf* is brought up, it must be remembered that the poet lived in a transitional period, and a sense of continuity is expected rather than an abrupt break with long past cultures and traditions. *Beowulf* is by no means devoid of Christian elements, but that is not to be measured by selected words and terms at the expense of other elements and virtues embodied in the poem, and which are not necessarily Christian. For a more recent study that comprises a reasonable and balanced, though not comprehensive treatment of the issue in question, see William Reynolds (1978:27—42).

[2] For more information about Whallon's position, see his two other articles, "The idea of God in *Beowulf*", *PMLA LXXX* (1965), 19—23; and "Formulas for heroes in the *Iliad* and *Beowulf*", *MP LXIII* (1965), 95—104.

(1968:356). Actually, Whallon has ignored the poet's use of not only variation, but enumeration, amplification, repetition, and almost all that relates to the poet's rhetorical artifice. In the course of discussing this artifice, "economy" will prove to be inapplicable to the language of *Beowulf* and incompatible with the rhetorical effect that the poet attempts to produce through this language.

As has been mentioned above, it is necessary to adopt a comprehensive view of the language of *Beowulf* in order to determine its nature and function. Such an approach will surely have to take into consideration the provocative conclusions of Francis P. Magoun's study of the composition of *Beowulf* at least in as much as his Oral Formulaic Theory has contributed to opening new avenues of investigation in Old English poetry. Magoun has shared with other critics the notion that "the characteristic feature of *all* orally composed poetry is its *totally* formulaic character" (Magoun 1966:190, italics are mine).[3] This seems to be his ready answer to a question raised before: Is *Beowulf*'s language strictly formulaic? Magoun, then, expands on the notion, and with more assurance claims that:

> Oral poetry, it may be safely said, is composed *entirely* of formulas, large and small, while lettered poetry is *never* formulaic, though lettered poets occasionally consciously repeat themselves or quote verbatim from other poets in order to produce a specific rhetorical or literary effect (Magoun 1966:190, italics mine).

The evidence that Magoun presents to support his thesis is admittedly large, but it is not large enough, in the case of *Beowulf*, to warrant his construction of that impassable bridge between oral poetry and lettered poetry. What can be more "safely" hypothesized in this respect and in general terms is that oral poetry is composed largely of formulas, while lettered poetry is partly formulaic. More specifically, the *Beowulf* poet had had the opportunity and the skill to utilize the oral tradition to the best of his interest, in that the language he used was formulaic only in part, and even that conventional part was well used, not only to serve metrical and alliterative purposes but also to produce rhetorical effects on his audience. To the degree the *Beowulf* poet succeeded in employing his language in order to serve multiple poetic purposes achieved primarily through the use of meaningful diction and an effective rhetorical artifice, his poetry can be rightly considered lettered, and *not* "totally formulaic" poetry, composed by an unlettered scop. Thus, it has become evident from this brief critical survey that it is misleading to select words and terms from *Beowulf* to provide evidence for the existence of what has been called an "almost entirely Christian" poem. It is just as misleading to apply the concept

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[3] An interesting study would then be to apply what is being quoted above to the orally composed Arabic poetry, as a part of that "all" in order to discover how "totally" formulaic its character is.

of "economy" to *Beowulf*, if not to all Old English poetry. And it is unrealistic to label the language of this poem as totally formulaic. The three examples of criticism cited, it will be shown, have not dealt adequately and justly, if at all, with the poet's choice of diction, whether conventional or of his own making. Actually, the whole rhetorical artifice that he employs throughout the poem has been ignored.

Lest the usage of such terms as the rhetorical artifice, rhetorical effect, and so forth should sound presumptuous, two main points need to be clarified and emphasized before going any further. The first point, very briefly stated, has to do with the relationship between rhetoric and poetics. Recent scholarship has re-affirmed the existence of such a relationship and pointed at the impact of rhetoric on poetry, if not on all means of effective communication. With Aristotle, the father of literary criticism, Wayne C. Booth recognizes that "one thing the poet does is to produce effects on audiences" (1961:92). Booth is aware of the fact that "poetics is not the study of effects designed to suit the characteristics of particular audiences" (1961:92). But his strong conviction is that "the rhetorical dimension in literature is inescapable" (1961:105). He ably demonstrates "that the author cannot choose to avoid rhetoric; he can choose only the kind of rhetoric he will employ" (1961:149).

The second point is concerned with the assumption in this paper that the *Beowulf* poet had a knowledge of the art of rhetoric. A considerable number of critics (e.g., Klaeber and Brodeur) have acknowledged the existence of rhetorical elements in Anglo-Saxon poetry. In an extensive study of the larger rhetorical patterns in Anglo-Saxon poetry, Adeline Courtney Bartlett examines certain Old English poems, including *Beowulf*, investigates Latin and Christian influences that affected Anglo-Saxon rhetoric, and sets forth the thesis that there are "long rhetorical units" in Anglo-Saxon poetry."…these patterned verse groups", Bartlett adds, "are often effectively rhetorical and that they are undoubtedly rhetorical in intention" (Bartlett 1935:1). More recently, Jackson J. Campbell has undertaken a study which shows that the Anglo-Saxon poet had a knowledge of rhetorical figures. *Ars Maior* of Donatus, and *De Schematibus* of Bede, and *Etymologiae* of Isidore are only a few of the sources of influence from which the Anglo-Saxon poet could acquire a considerable knowledge of rhetoric (Campbell 1967:1—20). Campbell 's conclusion is that "Criticism of all Old English poetry should therefore be wary, for in many formulaic poems a conscious rhetorical artificer is at work" (1966:201). It is with those two points of justification, together with Campbell's caution in mind, that the examination of the style of *Beowulf* is being conducted.

In almost any given passage of *Beowulf* the most striking feature of its poetic diction is the power of expressiveness. The power is enriched by the number of ways the poet conveys a single thought and/or emotion. The suggestive-

ness of epithets, the implication of metaphoric phrases, the variety of words, simple and compound, the built-in relationship among words and meanings — are only few of the components of the poetic diction used in *Beowulf*. Lines 210—224,[4] for example, depict the ship of the Geats traversing the sea and approaching the shore. This, of course, signals the end of Beowulf's voyage to the land of the Danes. The descriptive details of the scene suggest a necessary shift. The picture imprints in the minds of his audience a beautiful image of the ship, of its crew, and of the surroundings. It also affords some kind of relief from a long journey that the audience has been following. The beautiful epithets "fāmīheals" (218) describing the ship, and the expressive word "wǣg-holm" (217) indeed pulsate with life. Even in such direct and simple words as "Liðende land gesāwon" (221), one almost hears those voyagers heaving a sigh while looking smilingly at the land and the shining sea-cliffs. By contrast, when the poet wishes to create a gloomy and horrible portrait of the monster and his place, for instance, different though fitting words and images are used:

(ac se) ǣglǣca	ēhtende wæs,
deorc deaþscua,	duguþe ond geogoþe,
seomade ond syrede;	sinnihte hēold
mistige mōras;	(159—162ª)

The poet's deliberate choice of words such as "deorc dēaþscua", "mistige mōras" and the overwhelming "sinnihte" strongly suggests through connotation and association of the meanings, the impression of terror, and the imminent danger of that deadly enemy.

The poetic power of diction is more manifest in the rhetorical artifice of *Beowulf*. One of the major rhetorical devices employed in the poem is variation.[5] Examples of this vital device will reveal its simple and complex types and the effect produced by each type. Kings "Gār-Dena" are introduced in the beginning of the poem and identified as "þeodcyninga" (1—2); "geong in geardum" is a variation of "eafera" (12—13); "felahrōr" is a variation of "Scyld" (26—27); "Scyldes eafera" is a variation of "Bēowulf" (18—19). These are simple kinds of variation that help the poet develop his conception of the given characters and their relationship with each other, thereby establishing in the audience's minds a particular identifying trait or attribute of each of them. Sometimes, the *Beowulf* poet needs to use variation in connection with a single character

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[4] Fr. Klaeber (1950). All subsequent quotations of words, lines or passages will be indicated parenthetically by line numbers. Speaking of poetic diction in *Beowulf*, Klaeber rightly states (1950:Lxiii) that "a good many terms are nowhere recorded outside of *Beowulf*, and not a few of these may be confidently set down as of the poet's own coinage".

[5] In his authoritative book *The art of Beowulf* (1959:40—41), Arthur G. Brodeur has provided the best definition of the term "variation". The chapter he dedicates for a study of variation in *Beowulf* is the most complete and satisfactory, and hence my indebtedness to the author in this regard.

in order to emphasize certain qualities. Thus Wulfgār speaks of Hrothgar as "wine Deniga", "frēan Scildinga", "bēaga bryttan" and "þeoden mǣrne" (350, 351, 352, 353). Not only do these descriptive variations emphatically tell more about the character of Hrothgar as a king who enjoys royal fame and glory, but also as a friendly king who displays intimacy and love for his subjects, the Danish people.

In the skillfully manipulated dialogue between Unferth and Beowulf, variation gives room for the former's rising passion (Gardner 1973:119, n. 17).[6] It also reveals Beowulf's perilous adventures. Unferth vehemently tells Beowulf:

> þǣr git ēagorstrēam   earmum þehton,
> mǣton merestrǣta,   mundum brugdon,
> glidon ofer gārsecg;
>
> (513-515[a])

The dialogue certainly reveals something about both the speaker and the addressee. Unferth impresses the audience as the passionate master of words, Beowulf as the man of adventures. The verbs "þehton", "mǣton", "brugdon" and "glidon" though denoting four different physical activities in the swimming match, comprise variations that relate to a single referent, namely, Beowulf.

Variation may be used in conjunction with an object, say a sword:

> Geseah ða on searwum   sigeēadig bil,
> ealdsweord eotenisc   ecgum þyhtig,
> wigena weorðmynd;   þæt [wæs] wǣpna cyst,—
>   (1557—1559)

Through this kind of variation, the supernatural power of the sword is emphasized. The poet consciously slows the pace of action. Beowulf is in a critical and decisive situation. Using variation here to give an account about the sword affords some kind of relief, if not assurance, that Beowulf's chances to win are greater than ever now. Soon follows the news that Grendel's mother is lifeless.

The same rhetorical device is used effectively for depicting a setting. The poet puts in Hrothgar's mouth words that give a graphic idea about the place where the evil monsters dwell:

> Hīe dȳgel lond
> warigeað wulfhleoþu,   windige næssas,
> frēcne fengelād,   ðǣr fyrgenstrēam
> under næssa genipu   niþer gewittð
> flod under foldan.   (1357[b]—1361[a])

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[6] Although I agree with the author on his main thesis in general, and the examples of humor and irony that he refers to in *Beowulf*, I find his suggestion that "the often-treated Unferth-Beowulf episode might have been designed for humorous effect" a bit far-fetched.

Such is the nature of place where Grendel's mother dwells, and where Beowulf is going to go in order to perform his second heroic mission. Variation in the quoted passage suggests the challenge and hardship that the hero is going to encounter. The device also dramatizes his prospective victory. It evokes fear in the minds of the audience, and later when victory is achieved, they are relieved, and their admiration for Beowulf is heightened. These examples should be adequate to point out the aesthetic and thematic importance of this rhetorical device. Its use so consciously and effectively attests to the truth of Donald K. Fry's judgment that "This requirement for variation represents an impulse diametrically opposed to economy" (1968:356). Fr. Klaeber justly states that "variation is the very soul of the Old English poetical style" (1905:237). It has been demonstrated that this is very true of variation in *Beowulf*, where the device is not used for artificial ornamentation, nor does it result in redundance. In the superior hands of the *Beowulf* poet, as Brodeur sums it up, "it is an instrument of power and beauty" (1959:44).

Enumeration does not come next to variation in point of importance and frequent occurrence in the poem, yet the difference between the two rhetorical devices needs to be clarified. "Unless each member of the sequence has the same referent", writes Brodeur, "we have not a variation, but an enumeration — or, in certain cases, a progression. The distinction may be observed clearly in lines 333—335[a], in which Wulfgār enumerates the offensive and the defensive weapons of the Geats" (Brodeur 1959:41). The distinction may be observed in another example. When the poet says: "þanon untȳdras ealle onwōcon,/eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnêâs," (111—112), he is listing a number of fiendish creatures. There is no common referent for them. Enumeration here, however, is meant to group such evil, murderous and wicked creatures, associate them with Cain, and give an impression about their common denominator.

Equally important for the *Beowulf* poet is the rhetorical device, kenning,[7] which has been considered as "one of the most distinctive marks of Old English poetry" and undoubtedly "an integral part of Old English poetic diction" (Collins 1959:1). The kenning could be a word but quite often a compound used metaphorically to enhance the rhetorical effect. It is primarily used to draw attention to a certain trait of a character or quality of a given object. Like variation, only in skilled hands does this device escape a mechanical usage. The very frequency of occurrence of kennings in *Beowulf* testifies to the diverse poetic purposes it serves.

The *Beowulf* poet uses kennings in his designations of the Deity, the king, the people, monsters, objects and so on. Of the many compounds used as kennings for the Deity, there are "Alwalda" (955, 1314), "Wuldurcyninge"

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[7] For a satisfactory definition of kennig consult Brodeur (1959:18). Cf. Fr. Klaeber (1950:Lxiii—Lxiv) and James Walter Ranklin (1905:357).

(2795). To indicate other attributes of the Deity, the poet may use a singe word
like "Dryhten" (187) or "Fæder" (188). The king is designated as "aldor Dena"
(668), "aldor Ēast-Dena" (392), or in a single word "aldre" (346), and in each
case the conception of the ruler is given life. The fact that "aldor" means both
"prince" and "life" perhaps adds to the effectiveness of such a kenning, in
that the ruler is looked upon by his people as a symbol of their life. The king's
people, too, are described in another context as "Beorht-Dena" (427). *Beorht*
as Godfrid Storms explains, means "'bright, brilliant, glorious' and in its com-
bination with *Dene* it stresses the glorious reputation of the Danes" (Storms
1957: 7). Storms does not use this compound as an example of kenning, but it
seems appropriate to consider it so, because of its special periphrastic usage in
the context in which it appears. This is the case when Beowulf, in a tactful and
gracious manner, addresses the gray-haired Hrothgar, his host, and submits
his request to kill Grendel, the arch-enemy of the Danes (407—432).[8] The ken-
ning used here, then, is an aid to avoid wounding the military pride and national
integrity of the Danish king and his subjects.

Kennings for monsters appear in the form of compounds in the main.[9]
Grendel is thus described "cwealmcuman" (792) and "helrūnan" (163) where
he is associated with both death and evil. He is also described through kennings
that take the form of phrases, e.g., "Godes andsacan" (786) and "fyrena hyrde"
(750). The latter kennings stress Grendel's antagonism to both God and man.
Similarly, certain objects in the poem are described in terms of kennings.
The sun is "Woruldcandel" (1965), "rodores candel" (1572) or simply "Lēoht"
(569). A sword is described as "yrfelāfe" (1903) to denote its importance in the
Germanic heroic tradition, or as a "guðwine" (1810) to denote its intimacy to
the warrior in battle. Some of these compounds must have been available
to the *Beowulf* poet. But that is not always the case. Arthur G. Brodeur con-
firms this point when he states that "In the 3182 lines of *Beowulf* I count 903
distinct substantive compounds, 518 of which occur in no other extant text.

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[8] In Thomas J. Jambeck (1973: 21—29) the author discusses Beowulf's petition to
Hrothgar at length (407—432) and points out that the *Beowulf* poet used syntactical
variation to delineate character. This stylistic technique, Jambeck convincingly argues,
was shared later on by the poet of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Both poets "viewed
the syntax of petition as an instrument of characterization" (1973: 24).

[9] Storms (1957) has made an elaborate study of compounded names in *Beowulf*.
Although Storms does not label those compounds as kennings, some of them are so. But
more important is the fact that he explains such compounds as "Beorht Denes", "Gare-
Dene", "Hring-Dene", etc. in detail to show how meaningful they are as used in the
poem. Storms discusses fifteen compounds, occurring in all twenty-nine times, and he
says that "in each case we have seen that their use is justified, not only as far as sense and
metre is concerned, but also as to poetic connotation and artistic significance" (1957: 22).
And with good reason, these findings add to the weight of evidence against Magoun's
claims which have already been noted.

And 578 substantive compounds occur only once each in the poem. These figures alone suggest both a high degree of originality and a very wide range in the diction of the work" (Brodeur 1959:7).[10] The poet's use of kenning as a rhetorical device, whether by modifying and adapting conventional figures or by making his own, produces the effect desired by him. Kennings have endowed *Beowulf* with variety and richness of expression. Variety of language in such a long poem diminishes boredom on the part of the audience whom the poet is entertaining. It gives rhythm to speech, and melody to its echoes and tones. Besides, it illuminates and emphasizes certain concepts by expressing them in a number of ways; and kennings contribute considerably to this kind of variety.

The difficulty of determining sharp distinctions among rhetorical devices is inescapable. In fact it is just as hard to determine that a supposedly rhetorical figure is rhetorical, knowing that language as a being and its usage as a phenomenon are in a state of flux. *Kent heiti* is a rhetorical figure that the *Beowulf* poet used, and by definition, both *kent heiti* and kenning are concerned with "periphrastic appellations in the base-word of which a person or thing is identified with something..." (Brodeur 1959:18). This part of Brodeur's definition involves the common grounds of the two figures. With this knowledge it is easy to accept the truth of the statement made by H. Van Der Merwe Scholtz that "fundamentally there is no difference between the kenning and the *kent heiti*" (1929:38). The rest of Brodeur's definition shows that there is a difference, because the term *kent heiti* should be used "for those more direct periphrases which identify the referent with something that it *is*..." (1959:18, 19).[11] The poet uses "ȳ̄δldan" (198) as a *kent heiti* for ship, and the ship is actually a traverser. The "sun", on the other hand is not a "rodores candel" except in a special periphrastic sense. The use of "ȳ̄δldan" as a *kent heiti* for the ship is one of the many examples that show how conscious the poet is in his choice of words. The two members of this term for the ship suggest movement and progression. And since "ship" is a favorite and recurrent word, the use of *kent heiti* saves the poet from the necessity of repeating the same word or a pronoun that stands for it. The same quality is true of other examples of *kent heiti* for the king: "sinces bryttan" (1922), "bēaga bryttan" (1487), "sincgyfan" (1342), and so forth. One important aspect of the king, the ruler, is revealed and emphasized, namely his generosity to his thanes and his encouragement of his warriors to accomplish heroic acts. Certainly there is no

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[10] For more information about the use of compounds in *Beowulf* see Brodeur (1959: 9 — 18); consult also J. R. Hulbert (1932) and J. L. Rosier (1963).

[11] See also "Diction : Synonyms" in Cassidy and Ringler (1971:267 — 269). Here, too, we are told (1971:268) that whether the *kent heiti* is literal or figurative "...the *kent heiti*, unlike the *kenning*, calls the referent something which it actually is".

"tension" between the referent (i.e., the king) and the base-word in these examples, but there is an association of meanings.

Among the larger stylistic characteristics used in *Beowulf* is the rhetorical understatement, technically known as "litotes". Fr. Klaeber[12] observes the frequent use of this figure in the poem, but he does not treat it fully in terms of types and effects. Frederick Bracher's detailed study of this rhetorical device in Old English poetry adds to the knowledge acquired through Klaeber's and other studies of the subject. The first type of understatement that Bracher discusses is a common one "achieved by the use of negation: the denial of the opposite..." (1937: 915).[13] An example of this common type is: "Ðone siðfæt him snotere ceorlas /lȳthwōn lōgon, þēah hē him lēof wǣre;" (202—203). "þeah" creates a subtle antithesis. What comes before the word evidently means that the wise men did not blame him, i.e., they encouraged him to undertake the expedition. Following "þeah" is the emphatic passive form through which it is understood that Beowulf was beloved by them. The involved subtlety would not allow for any deduction other than that they had enough wisdom to approve, if not encourage a man of great valor, like Beowulf, to go on. The audience's minds would indeed be tantalized by this understatement in as much as it touches upon the obvious wisdom of men and the implicit and antici- pated heroic victory of their leader.

Negation in an understatement does not necessarily need a specific negative word like "lȳthwōn", "nō", or "ne". Therefore, a second type of understate- ment might be called "incomplete negation" (Bracher 1937: 916). Such words as "lyt" and "fea" or their derivative forms are usually[14] used in this type (e.g., lines 1412f.; 3061f.; and 2836f.). "The most common and most striking type of understatement", as Bracher points out, "might be called adjectival — not that it necessarily involves adjectives — in the sense that it expresses certain kinds of qualities; a moral attitude, a value judgment, an intellectual or moral attribute, etc." (1937: 917). For example, the poet describes the sword with which Beowulf slays Grendel's mother by saying, "...næs sēo ecg fracod/ /hilderince", (1575[b]—1576[a]). Another example of the adjectival understatement is found in the lines referring to Higd, Hyglac's noble wife: "...næs hīo hnāh swā þeah, /nē tō gnēað gifa /Gēata lēodum," (1929[b]—1930). Higd's moral attribute, the generosity of a queen to her people, is displayed in this under- statement. Further examples can be found in lines 660f.; 1455f.; and 2489f.

Bracher mentions three of the commonest uses of understatements (pointed

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[12] See Klaeber (1950:Lxv f.). Also Klaeber (1905:Part IV).

[13] My discussion of litotes has been aided by this detailed study.

[14] Use of any of the negative or semi-negative words does not, of course, mean that negations always constitute understatements. Lines 214f. and 248f., e.g., are negations but not understatements.

out by other critics). They are: "'the mocking irony of hatred and aversion, humor, and emphasis'". To these he adds "moderation, or tempering of an expression" (1937:922). Beowulf's pompous words of his report to the Geatish king about his heroic accomplishment provides an example of the "mocking irony of hatred": "swā begylpan [ne] þearf Grendeles māga/(ǣnig) ofer eorðan ūhthlem þone," (2006—2007). Beowulf's boasting of Grendel's murder is not devoid of irony. It recalls his fallibility at the end. He is too proud to realize his moral ignorance, to anticipate his own downfall at the hands of Grendel's kind; but the audience knows better, and hence the ironic effect.

That *Beowulf*, as a whole, is serious and gloomy in tone and subject matter is generally granted. Yet it is not destitute of producing humorous effects. Humor, however grim it is, results from using such an understatement as in the following passage:

Næs ðā on hlytme	hwā þæt hord strude,
syððan orwearde	ǣnigne dæl
secgas gesēgon	on sele wunian,
lǣne licgan;	(3126-3129ᵃ)

As Bracher puts it, "the implication here is that, the dragon being dead, the men were very eager to plunder his hoard" (1937:924).

Emphasis is also secured through the use of rhetorical understatement. An example of this class appears in the coastguard's impressive remark about Beowulf: "nis þæt seldguma" (249). Finally, understatement may be used "to temper or moderate expressions," the reason being "a regard for politeness and decorum." (Bracher 1937:926). Beowulf's comment on King Hrethel's affection for him serves as good example: "næs ic him tō life lāðra ōwihte, /beorn in burgum, þonne his bearna hwylc," (2432—2433). Understatement, then, contributes its share to the total rhetorical artifice of *Beowulf*.

Besides variation, enumeration, kenning, *kent heiti*, and litotes, the lettered poet of *Beowulf* used antithesis, parataxis, and hypotaxis.[15] The latter two devices are rhetorical only in so far as they relate to other rhetorical devices like variation and enumeration. As a matter of fact, all forms of variation and enumeration are periphrastic. And sentences in *Beowulf* that are constructed out of variations, parallelisms,[16] enumerations are generally paratactic. As for antithesis, it is widely used throughout the poem in various ways for various ends. It may be used to sharpen a contrast between two characters or two concepts. Higd, for instance, is the noble, gentle, and generous wife of Hyglac. She is contrasted with Thrith, the violent, imperious, and haughty wife of Offa (1926ff.). In order to exalt his hero above all men, and to render his heroic

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[15] For a general study of parataxis and hypotaxis consult Alarik Rynell (1952).
[16] For a detailed study of parallels in *Beowulf*, consult Adeline Courtney Bartlett (1935:30f.).

actions credible, the poet endows him with a strength in his hand "þritiges manna" (379f.) Antithesis, to be sure, is not confined to characters. In terms of ideas the poet employs this antithesis:

	Wā biŏ pǣm ŏe sceal
þurh sliŏne niŏ	sāwle bescūfan
in fȳres fæþm,	frōfre ne wēnan,
wihte gewendan!	Wēl biŏ pǣm þe mōt
æfter dēaŏdæge	Drihten sēcean
ond tō Fæder fæþmum	freoŏo wilnian!

(183ᵇ - 188)

The poet is obviously moralizing here. He is expressing a religious sentiment through antithesis. The woes and miseries of a capricious and transient world are contrasted with the permanent bliss and security of the other world. Antithesis can also be observed in descriptions of places like the towering, gold-plated Mead-hall (67f.; 81f.; 484f.; 305f.) and the gloomy, dark, horrible Mere (1358ff.). Antithesis usually points at a moral purpose. Wiglaf's taunting speech to the Geatish thanes (2864 ff.) is a striking example of a contrast between the highest Germanic ideals (bravery and loyalty) and the basest practices of men (cowardice and betrayal). Beowulf himself is a good example of antithesis. His character seems to be a series of contrasts between strength and frailty, knowledge and ignorance, humility and pride. Undoubtedly, there is an ironic thread that runs throughout the artistic tapestry of *Beowulf* and antithesis is a chief weaver. Ironic implications, moreover, often accompany parallels with antithetical content whether the poet is delineating characters, unfolding themes, or depicting scenes.

It has been seen in this close but by no means exhaustive examination of diction and rhetorical devices in *Beowulf* that there is a lettered poet engaged leisurely in serious entertainment of a sophisticated audience. This poet draws upon a profuse "word-hoard" that is conventional and partly original.[17] In his capacity as a "rhetorical artificer at work" he borrows, but he modifies and adapts a single word, a compound word, an epithet or a phrase to his poetic purpose just as the occasion demands. The power of expressiveness is conceived through the meaning suggested, the impression made, or the image called forth. The variety of the poet's stylistic features is in proportion to the

[17] A "high degree of the originality and a very wide range in the diction of the work" has drawn the attention of perceptive critics [see footnotes no. 4 and 9]. James L. Rosier (1963:10—13) examines the diction of *Beowulf* and makes similar factual observations. Rosier finds a "relatively large number of new compounds" in the poet's diction using "hand" as a baseword for them, and that "the number of these words which occur only in this poem is ten...". Rosier's findings in *Beowulf* point at the poet's "high degree of probable originality...". These testimonies, among others, make it very hard to accept Magoun's assumptions as *entirely* valid.

diversity of the thoughts, emotions, moods, echoes, and tones that he wishes to impart to his listening audience. Through gradual and associative process the employment of such a language achieves both an aesthetic and conceptual function. The very aspect of variety is a source of beauty and delight. It is through an effective use of such rhetorical devices as variation, enumeration, kenning, *kent heiti*, antithesis, and the like, that the poet builds up the architectonics of *Beowulf*. That the professional scop of *Beowulf* (who certainly had had no academic degree in classical rhetoric) was a lettered poet familiar with past and present literary traditions is more than a reasonable hypothesis. The pervasive rhetorical artifice employed in *Beowulf* attests to the validity of this hypothesis, and indeed tells more than one usually expects of the poetry, its maker and his audience.

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