Neophilologus (2021) 105:425–436
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11061-021-09678-6

Beowulf 501b and the authority of Old English poetical manuscripts

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Accepted: 10 April 2021 / Published online: 23 May 2021

Abstract
In his *Old English grammar*, A. Campbell put forward his theory of Old English accentuation, according to which disyllabic words like *Bēowulf* and *ǣniġ* receive a half-stress only if made trisyllabic by the addition of an inflection (as in *Bēowulfes* or *ǣniġra*), provided the middle syllable is heavy. A. J. Bliss tacitly rejected Campbell's analysis when he postulated the existence of metrical type 3B2, a rare rhythmical pattern in which trisyllabic forms like *Bēowulfes* and *ǣniġra* must exceptionally be assumed to lose their otherwise conventional half-stress. Bliss based his analysis on the evidence afforded by four readings from the text of *Beowulf*: ll. 501b, 932b, 949b, and 1830b. Even though Bliss expressed reservations about his own analysis, he still preferred it to the alternative possibility of emending these four exceptional verses (a possibility that he did not even consider in his book). Non-metrical arguments in support of the emendation of at least one of these verses (1830b), however, had been advanced well before *The metre of Beowulf* was first published. Since then, ll. 932b and 949b have also been emended on grounds other than metre. This article offers new linguistic reasons for the emendation of l. 501b, the one remaining reading for which no alternative explanation had yet been proposed. It concludes that Bliss was unnecessarily cautious in his treatment of these four aberrant verses, and that, as Kenneth Sisam memorably stated in 1946, conjectural emendation is, and still remains, a useful tool for the study of Old English poetical manuscripts.

Keywords *Beowulf* · Textual criticism · Old English poetry · Manuscript studies

Personal names like *Hrōðgār* and *Gūðlāf*, which consist of two different elements or themes (for which reason they are known as dithematic), abound in Old English heroic verse. In terms of accentuation, these names can be seen to have affinities to

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both simplices and true compounds. If a second name element (or deuterotheme) is monosyllabic, then the personal name behaves like a regular disyllabic simplex. A verse like *Beowulf* 356b,[1] *þǣr Hrōðgār sæt*, for example, is metrically equivalent to l. 42a, *on flōdes ēht* (both are type B verses: x / x /). If the name is made trisyllabic by the addition of an inflection, however, the name is then metrically identical to a compound. *Beowulf* 1066b, *Hrōðgāres scop*, for instance, is a type E verse, like *Genesis A* 1990a, *wælgāra wrixl* (/ \ x /). Words that consist of heavy derivative suffixes, such as *-iġ*, *-ing*, and *-isc*, evince a behaviour in verse analogous to that of dithematic names, provided that, when the word is inflected, the middle syllable is heavy. In *Beowulf* 1099b, *þæt ðǣr ǣniġ mon*, which is a type B verse (xx / x /), *-niġ* occupies a drop because *ǣniġ* is disyllabic. When the word is made trisyllabic through the addition of an inflectional ending, the word then scans as a compound, as in l. 3127b, *ǣniġne dǣl*, a type E verse rhythmically equivalent to *wælgāra wrixl* and *Hrōðgāres scop*. On the basis of these differences in metrical behaviour between disyllabic and trisyllabic forms, which are well-attested in the poetry, A. Campbell formulated the grammatical rule that dithematic names and words containing heavy derivative suffixes receive a half-stress only when the addition of an inflection renders them trisyllabic (1959: §§88–89).[2] Thus, trisyllabic *Hrōðgāres* and *ǣniġne* scan / \ x (not / xx), but disyllabic *Hrōðgār* and *ǣniġ* scan / x (not / \).

Campbell's account, though based on a very substantial number of unambiguous examples from verse, was tacitly rejected by A. J. Bliss. In his *The metre of Beowulf*, Bliss analysed as having an unstressed middle syllable a total of four words that, according to Campbell's rule, ought to receive a half-stress by virtue of their trisyllabic forms (1967: §59). This group of four words consists of two dithematic names (*Bēowulfes* in l. 501b, *wæs him Bēowulfes sīð*, and *Hiġelāce* in l. 1830b, *Iċ on Hiġelāce wāt*) and two instances of (*n*)*ǣniġ* followed by an inflection (*ǣniġra* in l. 932b, *þæt iċ ǣniġra mē*, and [*n*]*ǣniġre* in 949b, *Ne bið þē* [*n*]*ǣniġre gād*). The rationale behind Bliss's rejection of Campbell's analysis is that, if *-wulfes*, *-lāce* and *-iġ-* received a half-stress in these four half-lines, as Campbell's rule demands, then they would scan as type E verses with disyllabic anacrusis—a highly improbable interpretation, given that disyllabic anacrusis is virtually non-existent in stylistically conservative works like *Beowulf* (Bliss 1967: §50). Instead, he took these verses as the only instances in the poem of type 3B2 (xx / xx | /), a rare variety of metrical type B whose internal unstressed position is occupied by an unusually prominent element. Implicit in Bliss's analysis is the assumption that, on these four occasions alone, the poet exceptionally ignored the otherwise conventional half-stress on inflected deuterothemes and heavy derivative suffixes. Bliss thus managed to avoid scanning these half-lines as type E verses with disyllabic anacrusis, to be sure, but

[1] *Beowulf* is cited from the fourth edition of *Klaeber's Beowulf* (Fulk et al. 2008). Poems other than *Beowulf* are cited from Krapp & Dobbie (1931–1953). Macrons and other diacritics have been silently added. Translations are mine unless otherwise specified.

[2] Campbell speaks of stress, but what is really at issue is metrical ictus, given that Campbell's evidence is all metrical (see Pascual 2020).

he still expressed reservations about his own alternative analysis. As he put it, 'even so the metrical pattern [of these four verses] seems anomalous' (1967: 53).

Despite his reservations about his own analysis, Bliss still preferred it to the possibility that these four anomalous verses might be the product of defective textual transmission (an alternative that he did not consider in his book). This is no doubt a sign of the great authority that he accorded Old English poetical manuscripts. Still, compelling non-metrical arguments in support of emendation had been advanced for at least one of these verses well before the revised edition of *The metre of Beowulf* was published. Frederick Klaeber (1950: 193), in the notes to his third edition of the poem, mentioned the possible emendation of dative *Hiġelāce* to accusative *Hiġelāc* at l. 1830b, an emendation that was subsequently adopted in the text of the fourth edition of *Klaeber's Beowulf*[3]:

Iċ on Hiġelāc wāt,
Ġēata dryhten (1830b–1831a)
[I trust that Hygelac, lord of the Geats.]

L. 2650b, *God wāt on meċ*, shows that the construction *witan* + *on* requires its object to be in the accusative case, not the dative. This emendation also remedies the lack of grammatical congruence between manuscript *Hiġelāce* and its appositive *dryhten* in the next line (an accusative form). The emended verse, *Iċ on Hiġelāc wāt*, is a conventional type B verse, like *þǣr Hrōðgār sæt* or *on flōdes ēht* (with resolution of *Hiġe-*).[4] It is easy to see how manuscript *Hiġelāce* came to substitute for *Hiġelāc*. Unlike in 2650b (*God wāt on meċ*), the verb *wāt* in 1830b comes after the preposition *on*. As a result, the scribe probably failed to construe the preposition in conjunction with *witan*, thereby writing mechanically the dative form of the name that he expected after *on*.[5]

In *A history of Old English meter*, R. D. Fulk argued that there are additional syntactic reasons to doubt the authenticity of ll. 932b and 949b (1992: §§242–243). These are the contexts in which these two half-lines occur:

Þæt wæs unġeāra þæt iċ ǣniġra mē
wēana ne wēnde tō wīdan feore
bōte ġebīdan (932–934a)
[It was not long ago that I did not ever expect to experience remedy for any of my troubles.]

[3] Trautmann (1904), Holthausen (1948), Sedgefield (1935), Krapp & Dobbie (1931–1953) and Wrenn (1973) also read *Hiġ*(*e*)*lac*. Wrenn (1953) has *Hiġelāce*. Sedgefield (1913) read *iċ wāt on Hiġelāce* in his second edition of the poem. (See Fulk et al. 2008: 19.) *The metre of Beowulf* was first published in 1958.

[4] This verse also features an expanded first drop (*iċ on*). For a concise account of the orchestrated functioning of resolution and drop expansion in Old English verse, see Pascual (2014: 811–812). On the relationship between metrical rules and textual criticism, see Fulk (1997, 2007), Pascual (2013–2014, 2015, 2017, 2019), and Neidorf (2016a). A historical account of the metrical rules can be found in Pascual (2016). If the form of the Geatish king's name was disyllabic *Hyglāc* instead of trisyllabic *Hygelāc* in the poet's dialect, as seems plausible (Sievers 1885: 463–464; Sweet 1885: 157, l. 122, and 160, l. 229; Ward 1929; Lapidge 1982: 178), then the first lift would obviously not be susceptible to resolution.

[5] This is thus a case of syntactic misconstruction similar to the one hypothesized for l. 1903b: a scribe erroneously took adverbial *on* as a preposition, and hence altered nominative *naca* to dative *nacan* (see Neidorf 2017a: §72).

Ne bið þē [n]ǣniġre gād.
worolde wilna, þe iċ ġeweald hæbbe. (949b–950)
[There will not be for you lack of any worldly pleasures that are at my disposal.]

These two instances are parallel to the Modern English construction *to have need of any help*. Old English verse, however, has a preference for synonymous phrases of the type *to have any need of help*, in which *any* depends on the head rather than on the modifier of the phrase, as the following examples from across the corpus show:

þone synscaðan
ǣniġ ofer eorþan īrenna cyst,
gūðbilla nān, grētan nolde. (*Beowulf* 801b–803)
[Any paragon of irons over the earth, of war-swords, would not harm the criminal attacker.]

ah hē þāra wundra ā
dōmāgende, dǣl nǣniġne
frǣtre þēode beforan cȳðde. (*Andreas* 569b–571)
[But he, possessor of glory, did not ever reveal any portion of those wonders in the presence of that obstinate people.]

nē þē ǣniġ nēdþearf næs ǣfre ġīet
ealra þāra weorca þe þū ġeworht hafast (*Meters of Boethius* 20.20–21)
[Nor did you ever yet have any need for all the things that you have created.]

nysses þū wēan ǣniġne dǣl (*Christ III* 1384b)
[You did not know any measure of sorrow.]

As can be seen, forms of (*n*)*ǣniġ* agree grammatically with the heads of their phrases (*cyst*, *dǣl*, *nēdþearf*) rather than with the dependent genitives (*īrenna*, *þāra wundra*, *ealra þāra weorca*, *wēan*). Emendation of genitival *ǣniġra* and [*n*]*ǣniġre* to accusative *ǣnġe* and nominative [*n*]*ǣniġ* at *Beowulf* 932b and 949b results not only in more idiomatic syntax, but also in more conventional metre:

Þæt wæs unġeāra þæt iċ ǣnġe mē
wēana ne wēnde tō wīdan feore
bōte ġebīdan (932–934a)
[It was not long ago that I did not ever expect to experience any remedy for my troubles.]

Ne bið þē [n]ǣniġ gād
worolde wilna, þe iċ ġeweald hæbbe. (949b–950)
[There will not be for you any lack of worldly pleasures that are at my disposal.]

Forms of (*n*)*ǣniġ* now modify the heads of their noun phrases (*bōte*, *gād*) rather than their dependent genitives (*wēana*, *worolde wilna*), as in the four examples above.

The two verses, moreover, are now regular instances of type B with their two medial positions occupied by disyllabic words scanning / x (*ǣnġe*, *nǣniġ*): (x)xx / x /. The editors of the fourth edition of *Klaeber's Beowulf* underpoint the *re* of [*n*]*ǣniġre* at l. 949b, thus signalling that [*n*]*ǣniġ* is their preferred reading here. Although they leave *ǣniġra* at 932b unmarked in their text, their belief that this verse has suffered some sort of scribal tampering is registered both in the commentary and in the appendix on textual criticism (Fulk et al. 2008: 173, 331).

It is only natural that a scribe substituted genitive plural *ǣniġra* for accusative singular *ǣnġe* at l. 932b. The word is in close proximity to genitive plural *wēana*, in l. 933a, while accusative singular *bōte* (on which *ǣnġe* originally depended) does not show up until 934a. In this instance, the flexible word order of Old English verse, which allows closely related words to stand quite apart from each other, confounded the scribe, who misconstrued *ǣnġe* as an erroneous modifier of *wēana* in need of correction. The form [*n*]*ǣniġre* cannot be similarly explained, to be sure, as the word stands next to the head of the phrase, nominative *gād*. That the scribe spoiled the line's alliteration by writing down a form of *ǣniġ* rather than of *nǣniġ*, however, suggests that his exemplar was in some way defective at this point. According to Fulk, the scribe decided to alter the word, originally in the nominative, in an attempt to make it agree with masculine genitive plural *wilna*, but ended up making it agree with feminine genitive singular *worolde* (both in l. 950a).[6] Regardless of how the erroneous form might have crept into the text, syntactic considerations suggest that *ǣnġe* and [*n*]*ǣniġ* are likely to have been the readings at 932b and 949b in the scribe's exemplar. Thus, a variety of non-metrical arguments has been advanced suggesting that three of the four verses that seemingly contradict Campbell's analysis (1850b, 932b and 949b) are in actuality regular type B verses that comply with his grammatical rule. L. 501b, *wæs him Bēowulfes sīð*, is therefore the only one whose authenticity has never been called into question on non-metrical grounds, for which reason the editors of the fourth edition of *Klaeber's Beowulf* consider this verse the only secure attestation of metrical type 3B2 in the poem (Fulk et al. 2008: 331).

There are, however, linguistic reasons to suspect that the exceptional metrical pattern of l. 501b is likewise the result of scribal interference rather than of poetic practice. This is the context in which this verse occurs:

> Ūnferð maþelode, Ecglāfes bearn,
> þe æt fōtum sæt frēan Scyldinga,
> onband beadurūne. Wæs him Bēowulfes sīð,
> mōdġes merefaran, miċel æfþunca,
> forþon þe hē ne ūþe þæt ǣniġ ōðer man
> ǣfre mærða þon mā middanġeardes
> ġehēdde under heofenum þonne hē sylfa (499–505)

[6] It is perhaps no coincidence that this error was made only 17 lines after the erroneous alteration of *ǣnġe* to *ǣniġra* at 932b. After realizing that he should not have made *ǣnġe* agree with the noun to which it stood closest (*wēana*), he might have resolved not to commit the same error again, thus substituting *ǣniġre* for *nǣniġ* at 949b in order to avoid agreement with the noun immediately next to it (*gād*). Ironically, then, it might have been the scribe's commitment to avoiding the error that ended up generating it.

> [Unferth spoke, the son of Ecglaf, who sat at the feet of the Scylding lord, unbound secret hostility. The expedition of Beowulf, that brave seafarer, was for him *miċel æfþunca*, since he would not allow that any other man in the world should care for glorious deeds more than he himself.][7]

I have left l. 502b, *miċel æfþunca*, untranslated because it is upon consideration of its debatable meaning that the problematic character of this passage will become recognisable. The *Dictionary of Old English* (*DOE*) classifies the 25 occurrences of the word *æfþunca* into two semantic groups, 'a. spite, disdain; insult, offence' and 'b. envy, cause of envy', and gives *Beowulf* 501–502 under the second definition. This is probably where this instance belongs, since all the occurrences listed under the first definition refer to actions perpetrated with the intention to insult or harm other people. The following examples will suffice to illustrate this point:

> Eorl ōðerne mid æfþancum
> ond mid tēonwordum tæleð behindan,
> spreceð fæġere beforan, ond þæt fācen swā þēah
> hafað in his heortan, hord unclæne. (*Homiletic Fragment I* 3–6)
> [A man abuses another with insults and calumnies behind his back, yet speaks fairly to his face, holds all that malice within his heart, an impure hoard.]

> Ongan æfþancum āgendfrêan
> halsfæst herian, higeþrȳðe wæġ,
> wæs lāðwendo, lustum ne wolde
> þēowdōm þolian, ac hēo þrīste ongan
> wið Sarran swīðe winnan. (*Genesis A* 2239–2243)
> [The slave (Hagar) started to denigrate her mistress with disdain, she carried herself with arrogance, she was hostile and did not endure servitude gladly, but she began to compete fiercely and boldly with Sarah.]

> Mæġen nēalæhte
> folc Ebrea fuhton þearle
> heardum heoruwæpnum, hæfte guldon
> hyra fyrnġeflitu fāgum swyrdum
> ealde æfðoncan (*Judith* 261b–265a)[8]
> [The military force approached, the Hebrew people fought bitterly with hard martial weapons, they avenged their ancient struggles, the long-standing grievances, with blades, with ornamented swords.]

There is an evil intention behind the actions denoted by the *æfþuncan* of these passages: the term is used to refer to the hurtful words or cruel acts that an anonymous man (in *Homiletic Fragment I*), Abraham's female slave (in *Genesis A*), and the Assyrians (in *Judith*) directed respectively against another man, Abraham's

[7] For a compelling and eloquent defence of manuscript *ġehēdde* ('should care for') rather than emended *ġehēde* ('should perform') at l. 505a, see Pope (1986).

[8] Here I have adopted Mark Griffith's prosodic interpretation of *Ebrea* (Griffith 1997).

wife, and the Hebrews. In the passage from *Beowulf*, on the other hand, *æfþunca* denotes Beowulf's expedition to Denmark, which he undertook for the benefit of Hrothgar, not out of hostility towards Unferth. It could of course be argued that Beowulf's presence at Heorot is perceived by Unferth as an aggression, after all, and that *æfþunca* at l. 502b should therefore be construed as an instance of the first definition, 'spite, disdain; insult, offence'. The excessive sense of rivalry evinced by Unferth (who found it unacceptable that anyone else in the entire world should do better than him) suggests, however, that the word should indeed be interpreted as belonging to the semantic field of 'envy'.[9] Moreover, if Unferth regards Beowulf's arrival as an insult, this would lend *æfþunca* a metaphorical dimension unparalleled among other instances of the word and uncharacteristic of Old English, in which metaphors other than kennings are, in general, exceedingly rare.

The *DOE* gives 11 instances of *æfþunca* under definition 'b. envy, cause of envy'. In nine of these, different forms of the Old English word are used to gloss Latin *inuidia* (two glosses to Aldhem's prose *De uirginitate* and one gloss to the Penitential of Pseudo-Theodore) or *zelus* (one gloss to Defensor's *Liber scintillarum* and five Anglo-Saxon psalter glosses), both of which mean 'envy, jealousy' in their respective contexts.[10] Another instance, also meaning 'envy', occurs in the following passage from *Vainglory*:

> Bið þæt æfþonca eal gefylled
> fēondes fligepīlum, fācensearwum. (26–27)
> [That is entirely filled with the devil's flying arrows of envy, (with his) treacherous wiles.]

Thus, according to the *DOE*, of the 11 occurrences of *æfþunca* under definition 'b. envy, cause of envy', the sense 'cause of envy' is attested by only one instance in the entire Old English corpus: *Beowulf* 502b, *miċel æfþunca*. It is easy to see why this occurrence alone was assigned such an odd meaning. In the clause *Wæs him Bēowulfes sīð, mōdġes merefaran, miċel æfþunca* (ll. 501b–502), two nominative nouns, *sīð* and *æfþunca*, are linked by the copula, *wæs*. *Sīð* therefore equals *æfþunca* in this passage, but 'expedition', a countable noun, cannot equal uncountable 'envy', and so an alternative sense for *æfþunca* had to be found. In the light of the ensuing

[9] Scholars disagree as to whether Unferth is a scheming counsellor or a respectable champion, but virtually all commentators on the problem of Unferth agree that the character felt envy for the Geatish hero at this point in the narrative (see Neidorf 2017b: 445–446; for a different view, see Rozano-García 2019). Another factor to be borne in mind is that Unferth's envy aligns him with Grendel (see, for example, Emerson 1921 and Rich 1973).

[10] The two Aldhelm glosses, which occur in MS BL Royal 6 A.vi and MS BL Royal 5 E.xi, are late eleventh century (see Napier 1900: xv). The gloss to the Penitential of Pseudo-Theodore (in Brussels KB MS 8558–63) is early eleventh century (Ker 1957: 8, no. 10; see also Schlutter 1909: 512–514), like the gloss to Defensor's *Liber scintillarum* in MS BL Royal 7 C.iv (see, for example, Verdonck 1976; Derolez 1970; Bremmer 2008: 80–81). The five psalter glosses in which forms of *æfþunca* occur are tenth- or eleventh-century: Royal (c. 950), Salisbury (c. 975), Lambeth (c. 1025), Vitellius (c. 1050), and Arundel (c. 1075); see Roberts (2017: 40). Notice, however, that some of these glosses might have been copied from earlier manuscripts (see, for example, Clark 2009). For more information on all of these glosses, see the *DOE*, s.v. *æfþunca*, and the references therein.

causal subordinate clause introduced by *forþon* (ll. 503–505), 'cause of envy' probably presented itself as a reasonable alternative.

That such an unusual sense occurs in a clause that also happens to contain a metrically exceptional half-line (*wæs him Bēowulfes sīð*) suggests that something has gone awry with this passage in terms of textual transmission.[11] Of all the constituents of this clause, it is *sīð* that appears to be at the root of the problem. It forces *æfþunca* to mean something other than 'envy', it makes l. 501b feature an excessively heavy metrical pattern, and its contribution to the overall meaning of the passage is superfluous. Deletion of *sīð* results in an improvement on all these fronts[12]:

> Wæs him Bēowulfes,
> mōdġes merefaran, miċel æfþunca,
> forþon þe hē ne ūþe þæt ænigˇ ōðer man
> æfre mærða þon mā middanġeardes
> ġehēdde under heofenum þonne hē sylfa (501b–505)
> [He had great envy of Beowulf, of that brave seafarer, since he would not allow that any other man in the world should care for glorious deeds more than he himself.]

The emended version of l. 501b can now be seen to comply with Campbell's grammatical rule of dithematic names: *wæs him Bēowulfes* is a regular type C verse with a half-stress on its inflected deuterotheme, *-wulfes* (cf. 856b, *ðǣr wæs Bēowulfes*, 1043a, *ond ðā Bēowulfe*). With *sīð* deleted, there is no need to assign a non-attested sense to *æfþunca*: its meaning here can now be seen to be precisely the same as that in the other ten occurrences of the word discussed above ('envy'). Ll. 501b–502 are now similar to passages from the poem like the following:

> Denum eallum wearð,
> ċeastẹrbūendum, cēnra ġehwylcum,
> eorlum ealuscerwen. (767b–769a)
> [All the Danes, the town-dwellers, every brave man experienced distress.]

> Norð-Denum stōd
> ateliċ eġesa, ānra ġehwylcum
> þāra þe of wealle wōp ġehȳrdon (783b–785)

[11] Some scholars will no doubt prefer to see the metre of *wæs him Bēowulfes sīð* as an exceptional poetic licence that anticipates later verses like *The Battle of Maldon* 320a, *swā hī Æþelgāres bearn*. While this is an appealing possibility, it leaves the odd sense of *æfþunca* at 502b unaccounted for. If *wæs him Bēowulfes sīð* were a genuine poetic licence, moreover, one would expect to see it in the on- rather than the off-verse, as it in is the first half of the line where complex verses are regularly placed by the poets (see, for example, Russom 2016).

[12] Deletion of *sīð* was proposed by M. Trautmann in a short paragraph of his 'Berichtigungen, Vermutungen und Erklärungen zum *Beowulf*' (1899: 155). (In his edition, *sīð* is put in round brackets; see Trautmann 1904: 30). In support of his emendation, Trautmann adduced only the metrically unusual character of l. 501b, for which reason his case did not find much favour with editors of the poem. Alternatively, he also suggested reading *Bēowan* instead of *Bēowulfes*. F. Holthausen substituted disyllabic *beornes* for trisyllabic *Bēowulfes* in the last two editions of his *Beowulf* (see Fulk et al. 2008: 19). These last two possibilities are too speculative.

> [The North-Danes, each one of those who heard the mourning from the wall, felt real terror.]

As in ll. 501b–502, the experience of an emotion is being described in each of these two passages. In all three of them, the emotion experienced appears in the nominative singular as the subject of the clause (*æfþunca*, *ealuscerwen*, *eġesa*) while the experiencer appears in the dative (*him*, *Denum eallum*, *Norð-Denum*).

Scholars of *Beowulf* will no doubt be reluctant to accept the emendation here proposed unless a plausible explanation for the scribal interpolation of *sīð* at l. 501b (upon which my argumentation depends) can be offered. The phrase *Bēowulfes æfþunca*, which I take to be the original subject of the clause at ll. 501b–502, consists of a noun of emotion modified by an objective genitive. This means that the noun in the genitive denotes the object rather than the subject of the emotion, as in *Godes eġe* ('fear of God', not the fear felt by God), *mannes eġe* ('fear of a man', not the fear experienced by a man), or *þissere andwerdan worulde lufe* ('love for this transitory world', and obviously not the love felt by this world).[13] Thus, *Bēowulfes æfþunca* does not designate Beowulf's envy, but rather Unferth's envy for the Geatish hero. In her monograph on *Genitives in early English*, Cynthia L. Allen demonstrated that objective genitives with nouns of emotion underwent a process of gradual obsolescence throughout the history of the English language. To put it in her own words:

> While 'subjective' genitives such as *John's love (for Mary)* are still generally possible, and 'objective' genitives of some types, such as *the president's assassination* are also still possible, some other types of objective genitives became impossible in ME or EModE, and I will focus here on one particular type: objective genitives in which the genitive refers to the target of an emotion. In PDE, an expression such as *God's love* can only refer to the love which God has for someone, not the love which someone has for God (2008: 74).

Objective genitives with common nouns of emotion like *lufu* and *eġe* were still possible in late Old English, to be sure, but *æfþunca* is a rare word, disproportionately frequent in poetry.[14] If this noun was no longer recognized as taking an objective genitive by the time when the *Beowulf* manuscript was written,[15] the scribe might well have thought that the genitives at 501–502a (*Bēowulfes*, *mōdġes*

[13] See Mitchell 1985: §§1266, 1280–1283.

[14] See the *DOE*, s.v. *æfþunca*.

[15] The composition of *Beowulf* is here assumed to have antedated the production of its extant manuscript by approximately three centuries. For discussion of the subject, see Fulk (1992: §§406–421), Lapidge (2000), Orchard (2003–2004), Cronan (2004), Neidorf (2014, 2016b), Neidorf & Pascual (2014, 2019), Leneghan (2020: 236–246). It should be noted that I am not arguing that *æfþunca* ceased to mean 'envy' in late Old English, but rather that this word for 'envy' was increasingly less likely to take objective genitives. The evidence is scant. Of all the occurrences of the word noted by the *DOE*, only one might seem to take a genitive object: *swindan ł essian me dyde æfðanca huses ðines*, in the Royal Psalter. The example is unreliable, however, as the gloss may be rendering the Latin exactly (*tabescere me fecit zelus domus tuę*).

merefaran) needed to depend on a noun other than *æfþunca*, and hence he supplied one.[16]

The metre of Beowulf is a major achievement in Old English studies. Published for the first time in 1958, the book promises to remain influential and serviceable to future generations of scholars in years to come—and justly so, given its extensive range of analysis and its careful attention to detail. In the view of the present author, however, Bliss's refusal to consider the possibility of textual corruption for readings like *wæs him Bēowulfes sīð* is an unnecessarily cautious stance to adopt, especially in the light of his reservations about his own alternative interpretation. L. 501b and its immediate context are perfectly legible on fol. 141r of the *Beowulf* manuscript (Zupitza 1959: 24–25), to be sure, but the co-occurrence of metrical and linguistic problems at ll. 501b–502 renders conjectural emendation an appealing and justified course of action. As Kenneth Sisam argued, 'there would be a real gain if conjecture, instead of being reserved for the useful but disheartening task of dealing with obvious or desperate faults, were restored to its true functions, which include probing as well as healing' (1946: 268). It is to be hoped that emendation proposals for similarly aberrant manuscript readings will continue to be brought forward in the future, lest the very real possibility that they might be non-authorial in origin go unacknowledged.

Authors' contributions Not applicable.

Funding This publication is part of a project which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement number 695262.

Availability of data and material Not applicable.

Code availability Not applicable.

Conflict of interest Not applicable.

[16] Insertion of *sīð* might have been prompted by the occurrence elsewhere in the poem of the phrase *sīð Bēowulfes* (e.g. 872a). The interpolation here hypothesized is thus similar to the insertion of *þāra* at l. 9b: a scribe inserted a word to make the archaic language of its text sound more familiar to an early-eleventh-century audience (see Neidorf 2017a: §84).

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