Numerical composition and *Beowulf*: a reconsideration

YVETTE KISOR

ABSTRACT

Discussions of the structure of *Beowulf* that consider the sections of the poem disposed according to specific mathematical ratios are among the most frequently contested and least accepted by the larger scholarly community. This article examines several theories advocating numerical composition in light of both scholarship that describes structural patterns in the poem and editorial practice. Much agreement is found among theories from widely differing theoretical camps, clustering particularly around the first sections of the poem; however, such agreement does not consistently extend to specific numerical ratios. Further, the significance of such numerical correspondences as can be shown to exist has not been reliably demonstrated.

Mathematical theories of the structure of *Beowulf* posit a plan for the poem that is based on clear arithmetic principles. Often they concern the fitt divisions of the text, the numbered sections evident in the manuscript,[1] finding these sectional divisions to be not arbitrary, but a planned part of the poem's structural scheme. In addition, they frequently deal with other sections of the poem both smaller and larger than individual fitts, dividing the text into segments that relate to one another according to a clear mathematical plan. Such theories of numerical composition tend to be inherently text-centred as they focus on the manuscript as a physical object, noting divisions in the page, counting lines, and sometimes even words and characters. They approach the text through its originator, whether poet or scribe, and consider the author as imposing a mathematically based plan on the poem. Rarely do they consider the question from

[1] There is a discrepancy in the numbering of the fitts, as the Proem (1–52) is unnumbered, and after fitt 23, the first scribe apparently skipped a number, writing 25 before line 1652, which has been 'corrected' to read 24; the next four numbers have also been changed (26–9 have been altered to 25–8). These 'corrections' were originally attributed to the second scribe; however, Kevin Kiernan has challenged that attribution, claiming the changes were made by an early modern hand. Furthermore, fitt 30 is not marked by a number, though a large capital 'O' at line 2039 indicates the fitt break. Regular numbering resumes with fitt 31, beginning at line 2144. For a fuller discussion, see K. S. Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1981), pp. 264–70. For an unorthodox explanation for the fitt numbering in the manuscript, see P. W. Conner, 'The Section Numbers in the Beowulf Manuscript', *ANQ* 24 (1985), 33–8, and G. R. Owen-Crocker, 'Rings and Fitts', *The Four Funerals in Beowulf* (Manchester and New York, 2000), ch. 7, pp. 133–57.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the perspective of the reader or listener of the poem, except to address their detractors who frequently raise the question that has as of yet received no satisfactory answer – how can readers perceive such mathematically exact ratios of structure? And if they cannot perceive them, then why are they there?

A number of different numerically based patterns have been proposed for *Beowulf*, and have been received with some scholarly scepticism. Objections have ranged from questions of methodology and meaning to the lacunae in the manuscript.[2] One review may serve as a typical example. In her review of David Howlett's 1997 book, *British Books in Biblical Style*, Caroline Eckhardt focuses on his chapter on *Beowulf*. After considering several aspects of his work, she essentially withholds judgement, asserting that ultimately the only claim that can be made for Howlett's theories is the non-assertion, 'not proven'. She concludes by pointing to what is missing from Howlett's treatment: 'greater reference to previous scholarship; a more extensive investment in explanations . . . more attention to the literary implications of the proposed structural patterns; and a fuller allowance for alternative ways of reading these texts'.[3] Eckhardt's comments could be extended to other proposals of mathematical structure in *Beowulf* and it is this perceived deficit that I attempt to remedy here, considering such numerically based theories in light of other scholarship concerned with elucidating patterns of structure in the text, and examining the application of ideas concerning arithmetical relationships to the structure of *Beowulf*. In so doing, such 'readings' of *Beowulf* and the degree to which they 'write' the text they 'read' inevitably comes under scrutiny, as does the continuous interplay between the action of the reader and the structures of the text.

ASSESSMENT AND METHODOLOGY

One such theory of numerical structure in *Beowulf* is that of David Howlett, who has identified a mode of composition he terms 'Biblical style' operating in many

[2] Such objections are widespread but see T. C. S. Langen's comments and J. D. Niles's response in 'Patterning in Beowulf, Continued', *PMLA* 95 (October 1980), 870–3 at 870 and 872; for a more recent discussion, see the thread 'Re: [ANSAX-L] Orality versus Literacy' on the listserv AnsaxNet, in particular Edwin Duncan's comments of 23 February 2008 requesting an explanation that would demonstrate 'that the proportionalities . . . derived are not just interesting coincidences . . . but demonstrably significant numbers connected in some way to the narrative of the poem itself' and those of Daniel O'Donnell on 13 February 2008: 'I would put the more comprehensive claims of the numerologists in the same place . . . as not-proven (and probably not provable)'. These items appeared on AnsaxNet (ANSAX-L@WVNVM.WVNET.EDU) on 13 and 23 February 2008; they were posted by Edwin Duncan and Daniel O'Donnell with whose permission they are reprinted here. Daniel O'Donnell has reviewed similar claims of numerical composition in *Cædmon's Hymn*; see Note C of the Introduction 'Numerical and Geometric Patterning in *Cædmon's Hymn*', *Cædmon's Hymn: a Multimedia Study, Archive and Edition* (Cambridge, 2005).

[3] C. D. Eckhardt, review of *British Books in Biblical Style*, by David Howlett, *Speculum* 75, no. 3 (July 2000), 702.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

texts including some in Old English, among them *Beowulf*. In and of themselves, Howlett's theories are fairly straightforward. What he terms 'Biblical style' involves patterns of parallelism and chiasmus detectable in a wide variety of texts. These patterns range from small units (a few words or lines of verse) to the level of entire works. The disposition of these patterns occurs according to arithmetic ratios such as those of symmetry and the Golden Section,[4] to specify the most common. The placing of important words at set mathematically determined intervals is also a feature.[5] While Howlett does define his theories quite plainly, he is less clear about his methodology. As a result, his procedure, as practised in his writings and particularly as applied to *Beowulf*, appears somewhat haphazard. His basic method involves dividing the text into sections based on evidence of chiasmus and/or parallelism, and demonstrating arithmetic ratios within and between sections, if present. It is often unclear, however, how these sections of text are determined, and this lack of clear method opens Howlett's work up to charges of arbitrariness, such as those suggested by Eckhardt's review.

The importance of questions of methodology in theories of numerical composition may be demonstrated by reference to another scholar working in the field who has also focused a great deal of his attention on *Beowulf*. Though mentioned only glancingly in Howlett's study,[6] Thomas Hart has written extensively on the subject, beginning with a 1966 doctoral dissertation[7] and proceeding with a series of scholarly articles.[8] He has focused on questions of methodology from the outset, initially establishing 'Above all, however, the general direction of analysis must be from numerical structures to thematic structures, not the other way around.'[9] From this unambiguous, but perhaps simplistic view, Hart's position has developed to acknowledge that 'analyzing from content rather than from form may seem a reasonable way to proceed, in both time and priority of

[4] The Golden Section (also referred to as the Golden Ratio, extreme and mean ratio, and the divine proportion, among other terms) is a mathematical ratio prominent in mathematics and architecture since the Greeks in which the minor part (m) relates to the major part (M) as the major part relates to the whole (m+M), i.e. m/M=M/m+M.

[5] D. R. Howlett, 'Biblical Style: Its Rules and Adjuncts', in his *British Books in Biblical Style* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 1–31.

[6] D. R. Howlett, 'The Beowulf Poet', in his *British Books in Biblical Style*, p. 506, n. 21.

[7] T. E. Hart, '*Beowulf*: a Study of the Tectonic Structures and Patterns' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Univ. of Wisconsin, 1966).

[8] In chronological order: 'Tectonic Consideration of the Eotenas', *Thoth* 10 (1969), 4–17; '*Ellen*: Some Tectonic Relationships in *Beowulf* and Their Formal Resemblance to Anglo-Saxon Art', *Papers on Lang. and Lit.* 6 (1970), 263–90; 'Tectonic Design, Formulaic Craft, and Literary Execution; the Episodes of Finn and Ingeld in *Beowulf*, *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Älteren Germanistik* 2 (1972), 1–61; 'Tectonic Methodology and an Application to *Beowulf*', *Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval Literature*, ed. C. D. Eckhardt (Lewisburg, PA, and London, 1980), pp. 185–210; 'Calculated Casualties in *Beowulf*: Geometrical Scaffolding and Vertical Symbol', *SN* 3 (1981), 3–35.

[9] Hart, '*Beowulf*: a Study of the Tectonic Structures and Patterns', p. 46.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

proof. Paradoxically, the research experience of the past twenty-five years has taught us that the opposite course is, in most instances, more reliable.'[10] He takes on the question of methodology directly in a later article, noting the problem of 'the divorce of thematic from numerical features, resulting in an overemphasis on one or the other'.[11] It is an important issue, for numerical patterns have little relevance without corresponding thematic resonance,[12] at least for the perceivers of the work, but murky procedural principles leave open the possibility that one is being imposed on the other. Put another way, one can find numerical structures that have a clear configuration, but if the corresponding thematic relevance appears forced, then that casts doubt on the relevance of the structure. Conversely, too great an emphasis on thematic concerns leads to problems stemming from the abstract nature of the subject matter, for critics do not always agree on such matters. Hart deals with these difficulties by advocating a priority of method that considers evidence in order of increasing abstraction, moving from more concrete kinds of evidence such as manuscript markings and patterns of wording, to more abstract evidence such as thematic concerns.[13]

In his discussion of methodology, Hart cites the potentially differing opinions of readers, primarily critics, as a roadblock to considering thematic evidence.[14] However, in practice Hart frequently regards consensus of scholarly opinion as supportive evidence.[15] As Hart demonstrates this method in practice it seems sound, and goes a long way toward answering a potential objection to Hart's methodology: his ignoring of the critical controversy surrounding numerical criticism. While Hart does at times acknowledge both the newness of his field and its sometimes embattled nature,[16] in his discussion of methodology he does not take into consideration the basic problem that the evidence he prefers for its concreteness (manuscript markings, numerical patterns, etc.) is often widely disputed, for while critics might not be able to argue the fact of its presence, they can and do question

[10] T. E. Hart, 'Measure and Symmetry in Literature', *PMLA* 92 (January 1977), 126–8, at 127.
[11] Hart, 'Tectonic Methodology', p. 188.
[12] For an alternate view, see R. D. Stevick, who argues that such patterns can be proved precisely *because* of this lack of correspondence. See Stevick, *The Earliest Irish and English Bookarts: Visual and Poetic Forms before AD 1000* (Philadelphia, 1994), p. 237.
[13] Hart, 'Tectonic Methodology', pp. 188–9.
[14] As well as the discussions of methodology cited above (see nn. 9–11), see 'Ellen', p. 267, n. 13.
[15] See, for instance, his discussion of textual division in scholarly editions in 'Ellen', p. 273, n. 22; 'Tectonic Methodology', p. 190 and p. 206, n. 7; and 'Tectonic Design', p. 47, n. 10, and p. 48, n. 13.
[16] See, for instance, his response in *PMLA* to Peterson's *PMLA* article in which he refers to 'the highly controversial topic of numerical composition' ('Measure and Symmetry in Literature', p. 126), his reference to 'the modern lack of empathy for the almost mystical appeal that number seems to have had for our ancestors' in his article on 'Tectonic Methodology' (p. 186), and for a more complete discussion of the question, see his 'Poetry, Mathematics, and the Liberal Arts Tradition', *Syracuse Scholar* 3 (Spring 1982), 58–73.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

its significance. So though there may be agreement that certain numerical patterns are present in a text, all may not feel that their presence is anything other than accidental. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, what is on one level the most concrete kind of evidence (the number of fitts in a poem, the number of lines in a fitt) is at the same time the most disputed. Relying on scholarly consensus, when such consensus exists, is one way to answer charges of arbitrariness. Critical opinion also has value as a record of readings of a text, and critical objections are objections of readers, just as scholarly consensus represents agreement among readers.

My own methodology will attempt to answer what I see as the weaknesses in both Hart's and Howlett's procedures, and to incorporate what I see as their strengths. In brief, I will review numerical analyses of the structure of *Beowulf* with constant reference to scholarship that has preceded them in the field, both that which supports such analyses and that which undermines them. When conflicting opinion comes into play, I will attempt to weigh all the relevant analyses as judgements of readers, and make a reasonable assessment. I will also attempt to examine both kinds of evidence Hart discusses: concrete numerical data and thematic issues of content. Rather than prioritizing one kind of evidence over the other, I will consider both, for I see them as inextricably linked: numerical patterns of structure only have relevance through their correspondence to thematic patterns.

Before turning to the poem and numerical analyses of it, a few brief remarks regarding the relevant scholarship are in order. Scholarly consideration of patterns of structure in the poem fall largely into three categories or critical camps: editorial practice,[17] oral-formulaic criticism[18] and theories advocating numerical

[17] A full survey of the numerous editions of this poem is beyond the scope of my project here. I will limit my survey to 'modern' editions, taking the third edition of Klaeber, easily the standard, as my starting point; *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork, and J. D. Niles, 4th ed. (Toronto, 2008), appeared too late to be specifically included in this study, though it should be noted that in the sectioning of the text through verse paragraphing it does not differ substantially from the third edition. Thus I consider the following: *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. F. Klaeber, 3rd ed. (Lexington, MA, 1950); *Beowulf and Judith*, ed. E. van Kirk Dobbie (New York, 1953); *Heyne-Schückings Beowulf*, ed. E. von Schaubert (Munich, 1963); *Beowulf: a Dual-Language Edition*, ed. H. D. Chickering, Jr (New York, 1977); *Beowulf with the Finnsburg Fragment*, ed. C. L. Wrenn and W. F. Bolton, rev. ed. (Exeter, 1988); *Beowulf: a Student Edition*, ed. G. Jack (Oxford, 1994); *Beowulf*, ed. Michael Swanton, rev. ed. (Manchester and New York, 1997). I am excluding the most recent edition of the poem, *Beowulf: an Edition*, ed. B. Mitchell and F. C. Robinson (Oxford, 1998), because it does not utilize verse paragraphs or any other technique for sectioning the text other than the fitt divisions themselves. Among the editions I am including Dobbie alone eschews fitt divisions and numbering.

[18] Critics coming from this camp who have looked closely at the poem include H. W. Tonsfeldt, 'Ring Structure in *Beowulf*', *Neophilologus* 61 (1977), 443–52; J. D. Niles, 'Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*', *PMLA* 94 (1979), 924–35; and W. Parks, 'Ring Structure and Narrative Embedding in Homer and *Beowulf*', *NM* 89 (1988), 237–51.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

composition.[19] The first of these, editorial practice, is somewhat self-evident. The paragraphing, use of headings, and other means of demarcating the text used by editors of the poem represent a structural assessment of the narrative. So too do the introductory remarks frequently accompanying editions of the text. These ways of presenting the text represent readings of the text in two ways: they signify the received opinion of a majority of critical readers, and at the same time they perpetuate that opinion by shaping the way others read the text. A comparison of critical editions of the poem demonstrates the essential agreement in presentation of the text of the poem, and the common ground shared by the various accompanying materials.[20] As such, editorial material has value as a repository of readers' responses to the text, both formed and forming. The second two categories, however, are a bit more unexpected since they represent two very different critical stances, as the first, criticism advocating an oral-formulaic mode of composition, seems in direct opposition to the second, that positing numerical composition. Yet in spite of their theoretical differences, both groups practice a very similar technique, that of examining the text for patterns of chiasmus and parallelism, and when the work of one group supports the evidence of the other, it often proves compelling perhaps *because* of their differences. When two critics with such different agendas end up agreeing about structures in the text, even inadvertently, it suggests that such structures are actually present, however differently their presence may be interpreted by different critics – and readers.

A NUMERICAL ANALYSIS OF *BEOWULF*: AN OVERVIEW

In his 1997 book, Howlett does not provide a comprehensive overview of his schema for the structure of *Beowulf*, preferring instead to allow one to emerge through his detailed analyses of smaller sections of the poem. While these dense analyses can be confusing to navigate, and difficult to synthesize into a coherent overall picture, it is possible to construct an account of Howlett's overall vision of the poem's structure.[21] Howlett sees the poem as conforming to a three-part

[19] Both Howlett and Hart fall into this category; so too (at least for my purposes in this assessment) do E. Carrigan, 'Structure and Thematic Development in *Beowulf*', *Proc. of the Royal Irish Acad.* 66 (1967), 1–51 and C. Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns and the Structure of *Beowulf*', *Eng. Stud. in Canada* 1 (1975), 249–65. Hieatt examines specifically the integrity of the fitt structure of *Beowulf* in light of Hart's analysis, basing her work on that of A. C. Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern', *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (New York, 1935 and 1966), ch. 2, pp. 9–29.

[20] There is not total accord, of course, and minor points of dispute abound, but these are far outweighed by the points of agreement.

[21] For a much more coherent account of his overall scheme for the poem, see his earlier article which presents essentially the same material in a far less dense form: 'Form and Genre in *Beowulf*', *SN* 46 (1974), 309–25. However, there are some important differences between the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

structure,[22] the first third of which (fitts 1–14) consists of a chiastically bound pattern.[23] His analyses of the second and third parts are more complex, and the division between parts two and three occurs within a fitt (fitt 28), with part three beginning at line 1987.[24] Howlett sees each part as being dominated by a different genre of poetry: the first by the *syllic spell* ('strange story' – 2109b), the second by the *gyd . . . soð ond sarlic* ('true and mournful tale' – 2108b–2109a), and the third by the *sarigne sang . . . sorhleoð* ('mournful song . . . song of grief' – 2447a, 2460b). Thus the first part of the poem, centred around the battle with Grendel, is focused on tales of strange adventures, the second, concerned with the fight with Grendel's mother, is full of 'tragedies of civil and domestic strife' like the Finnsburh episode, and the third is elegiac in tone, typified by the Father's Lament or the Lay of the Last Survivor.[25]

While this overview leaves out the majority of Howlett's detailed analyses, which will be dealt with in greater detail in the next section, it does represent his outline of the poem as a whole, thus allowing for comparison with other schematic conceptions of the poem's overall structure. There are essentially five scholars, including Howlett, who have concerned themselves with constructing a structural scheme of the entire poem that takes into account either numerical features of the text, or chiastic patterns found within the poem, or both. Chronologically, Howlett (with his 1974 article 'Form and Genre in *Beowulf*')[26] falls in the middle of this group; he is preceded by Thomas Hart (1966) and Eamonn Carrigan (1967), and followed by Constance Hieatt (1975), and John D. Niles (1979).[27] A sixth scholar who observes chiasmus operating

two versions. While both describe an essentially tripartite structure, the points of division are different. Both schemes exclude the unnumbered Proem and begin part two with fitt 15; however, the 1974 article delineates a part three which begins with fitt 28 (line 1963) and excludes the final two fitts (42–43). Howlett gives no clear explanation for his revision of the scheme in his 1997 book.

[22] 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 506; for a good summary of the debate regarding the bipartite vs tripartite nature of the narrative (a debate totally ignored by Howlett), see K. Hume, 'The Theme and Structure of *Beowulf*', *SP* 72 (1975), 1–27, esp. pp. 3–4, n. 5, and T. A. Shippey, 'Structure and Unity', *The Beowulf Handbook*, ed. R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Lincoln, 1997), pp. 149–74, esp. p. 170.

[23] 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 521.

[24] *Ibid.* pp. 522–30.

[25] *Ibid.* pp. 531–3.

[26] This article contains ideas that are expanded and to some extent reworked in his 1997 book; see n. 21.

[27] While some of these scholars have published numerous articles on this subject, I have given the dates of their first work to present an overall conception of the poem's structure. I refer to Hart's 1966 doctoral dissertation (first article in print, 'Tectonic Consideration of the Eotenas', appears in 1969), E. Carrigan's 'Structure and Thematic Development in *Beowulf*', Howlett's 1974 article 'Form and Genre in *Beowulf*', C. Hieatt's 'Envelope Patterns and the Structure of *Beowulf*', and J. D. Niles's 'Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in the poem on a large scale is Gale Owen-Crocker (2000), who sees the poem as structured around the four funerals in *Beowulf*, that is, Scyld's, the Finnsburh pyre, the Last Survivor's (Owen-Crocker identifies his building of the barrow and lament as prefatory to his own death), and Beowulf's.[28] The first two of these critics, Hart and Carrigan, working independently and virtually simultaneously, both focus on the fitt divisions in the poem, but with considerably different results.

Thomas Hart examines the manuscript's fitt divisions and, as discussed earlier, proceeds according to the methodological procedure of considering numerical properties before thematic ones. He divides the poem into several 'fitt groups' based on line sums, and finds a basic division into two parts, the first part (Proem–32) dominated by the number thirty-three, the second (33–43) by the number twenty-nine. Thus the first thirty-three fitts are further divided into five groups consisting of either 330 or 660 lines (Proem–9, 10–14, 15–19, 20–3 and 24–32);[29] the second part, consisting of eleven fitts, is divided into three groups of 290 lines each (33–5, 36–9 and 40–3), a 3-4-4 fitt division.[30] Like Hart, Eamonn Carrigan uses fitt divisions to delineate his schema of the poem's structure, but he sees a tripartite rather than a bipartite structure operating. His scheme for the poem is symmetrical, dividing it into a 13-17-13 structure (encompassing Proem–12, 13–29 and 31–43) with these main sections further subdivided into a central 6-5-6 scheme (13–18, 19–23 and 24–9) flanked by two parallel 3-5-5 segments (Proem–2, 3–7 and 8–12; 31–3, 34–8 and 39–43).

All three of these schemes based on fitt divisions have appealing features. There is a neat symmetry to Howlett's[31] and Carrigan's tripartite divisions, and the three-part structure allows for a focus on each monster fight.[32] Hart's bipartite scheme has some especially intriguing mathematical features, as the fitt groups he suggests demonstrate some remarkable numerical symmetries. Yet there is a surprising lack of correspondence between the three schemes, and when sectional divisions do agree, it seems almost accidental. Even Howlett's and Carrigan's schemes, both tripartite and focused, at least in part,

[28] Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf*.

[29] It is worth noting that Hart, uniquely among scholars discussed here, does not assume 29–30 to be one fitt but sees fitt 30 as starting at line 2093.

[30] Hart allows for a one-line deviation from the pattern.

[31] At least in the scheme presented in his 1974 article.

[32] It should be noted that a tripartite view of the poem places the encounter with Grendel's mother at the centre, whereas a bipartite view sees it as a corollary to the battle with Grendel. J. Chance objected to the bipartite view espoused by Tolkien, among others, on just these grounds. See J. Chance, 'The Structural Unity of *Beowulf*: the Problem of Grendel's Mother', *Texas Stud. in Lit. and Lang.* 22 (1980), 287–303.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on the three monster fights, differ almost entirely in deciding where the three sections begin and end.[33]

The next critic after Howlett[34] to take on the structural patterns in the poem is Constance Hieatt, who considers both Hart's and Carrigan's work.[35] She focuses on envelope patterns in the poem, developing the ideas of Adeline Courtney Bartlett,[36] and attempts to use the existence of envelope patterns to 'constitute evidence for the integrity of the fitt structure'.[37] She also discusses envelope patterns on larger and smaller scales than fitts, and ends up constructing a scheme of the poem that includes numerous overlapping envelope patterns. Her design for the poem[38] is thus immensely complicated, making an interesting comparison to the simpler schemes of some of the other critics. Rather than specifying either a bipartite or tripartite structure, her design encompasses aspects of both, as she discusses envelope patterns that function on a variety of different levels.

Constructing quite a different design from Hieatt is John D. Niles, who makes no attempt to include every part of the poem, but does construct a scheme that spans its entirety. His is a clear tripartite structure that is based on three giant ring structures concentrated around each of the monster fights. For the most part, he deals only with the main narrative and excludes many of the digressions in the poem; however, his design is attractive for its very simplicity and the clearness of the chiastic echoes he points to.[39] Niles does not deal with fitt divisions or the numerical qualities that concern many of the other critics considered here; instead he comes from an oral-formulaic stance and takes as his starting point the chiastic ring structures that form a prominent part of many analyses of texts seen to have an oral-formulaic basis. As such, his work makes an instructive contrast to the work of some other critics who come from a hyper-literary stance, and the points of agreement between the various systems often make for some telling comparisons.

[33] In fact, the only point of agreement between the two schemes occurs in placing the conclusion of the third part at the end of the poem, and this correspondence occurs only with Howlett's later (1997) scheme, for the earlier (1974) plan excluded the last two fits.

[34] In his 1974 article.

[35] Her exclusion of Howlett is probably due to the fact that his article appeared in print only a very short time before her own work.

[36] See Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern'.

[37] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 251.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 260 for a diagram of the whole poem that includes just some of the envelope patterns she discusses.

[39] Niles first presents his scheme for the poem in his 1979 article, 'Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*'; his later chapter covers much of the same material: 'Ring Composition', *Beowulf: the Poem and its Tradition*, (Cambridge, MA, 1983), pp. 152–62.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The most recent scholar to identify patterns of chiasmus in the poem, Gale Owen-Crocker, identifies several chiastic rings, which she terms elliptical structures, functioning in the poem, all based on the four funerals in the poem. Two of these centre on the Finnsburh funeral pyre and the Lay of the Last Survivor; another, functioning between the Finnsburh funeral and the Lay of the Last Survivor, centres on the ninth hour (line 1600) as the watching Danes depart, having given up Beowulf for dead beneath the waters of the mere. Owen-Crocker also observes an outer elliptical structure functioning around these two funerals, seeing mirror images in the material between Scyld's funeral and the Finnsburh funeral, and the material between the Lay of the Last Survivor and Beowulf's funeral. These large chiastic structures based on funerals, with the exception of those operating around the Finnsburh pyre and the Lay of the Last Survivor, which will be enumerated in due course, are not described by any other scholar and are unique to Owen-Crocker, and for that reason I will deal with them only briefly here, as they do not admit a point of comparison to the other structurally based schemes under consideration.

In general, the chiastic patterns Owen-Crocker discovers are less convincing than some others owing to the weaker correspondences on which her elliptical structures are based. She does not consistently rely on either verbal echoes or narrative similarity to establish an elliptical correspondence, though she does mention such that occur. The simple mention of an object can constitute a correspondence in her scheme, and thus many of the connections she details are unconvincing. To detail just a few, she links the water of the mere welling with blood (1593–5) with the melting of the giant sword (1608), without explanation;[40] the approach to the mere (1408–13) is matched with the coast guard approaching the returning Geats (1892–3), again without explanation;[41] the sight of Æschere's head (1417–21) is connected to Beowulf's presentation of a sword to the Geatish coast guard (1900–3), this time with quite a bit of explanation which attempts to bring the two 'presentations' into a parallel position, but the connection appears forced.[42] These examples demonstrate the kinds of connections on which her chiastic scheme for the poem relies, and due to their relative weakness, aspects of her plan for the design of the poem, structured around the four funerals, appear imposed.

While a consideration of Owen-Crocker's chiastic scheme for the poem does not prove especially fruitful, a comparison of the structural designs of other scholars does. This reference to other scholarship allows numerical theories of pattern in *Beowulf* to be viewed alongside other readings of the

[40] Owen-Crocker, *Four Funerals*, p. 167.
[41] *Ibid.* p. 164.
[42] *Ibid.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

poem's structure, and such analyses, as attempts to account for discontinuous moments in the poem's structure, can be assessed alongside other efforts to do the same.

STRUCTURAL ANALYSES OF *BEOWULF*: A DETAILED EXAMINATION

Howlett begins his chapter on *Beowulf* by diving right in and pursuing an in-depth analysis of the unnumbered Proem.[43] He is almost alone in doing so, as no other scholar interested in delineating chiastic patterns or identifying numerical features has given the Proem the comprehensive scrutiny that Howlett has; aside from Howlett only John D. Niles has addressed it in any detail. Howlett begins by isolating the opening three lines, noting a parallelism that conforms to the Golden Section in both the number of words and the number of syllables.[44] Howlett is not alone in isolating these opening lines: Klaeber gives them a separate paragraph in his edition as do all other modern editors.[45] Howlett goes on to describe a series of chiastic patterns that divide the remaining lines of the Proem into both smaller and larger sections, frequently finding the chiastic centres to fall at the Golden Section. He sees a large chiastic pattern operating over the entirety of the Proem (excluding the opening three lines).[46] He further divides the Proem into sections, each demonstrating its own chiastic structure: lines 4–19 detailing the lives of Scyld Scefing and his son Beow, lines 20–5 consisting of gnomic sayings concerning the warrior's duty, considered by Howlett to be the crux of the Proem, and 26–52 detailing Scyld's funeral. He further divides the sections preceding the gnomic sayings (20–5) into two: lines 4–11 telling of Scyld Scefing, and lines 12–19 discussing his son Beow. The second of these is the only section of the Proem that has been identified by another scholar as demonstrating chiasmus, and Niles' scheme essentially corresponds to Howlett's.[47] Editorial divisions in general agree with Howlett's, though in the main editors encompass the larger divisions rather than the smaller ones in their paragraphing of the text. Klaeber, Dobbie, Heyne-Schücking, Chickering, Wrenn and Bolton and Jack all begin a new verse paragraph at line 26, an important break in Howlett's scheme, but do not further subdivide the text. Swanton alone includes additional breaks at lines 12 and 32; the first of these is mirrored in Howlett's divisions (and Niles') but not the second.

[43] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', pp. 506–10.
[44] *Ibid.* p. 506.
[45] I refer here to the editions of F. Klaeber, E. van Kirk Dobbie (henceforth Dobbie), E. von Schaubert (henceforth Heyne-Schücking), H. D. Chickering, Jr, C. L. Wrenn and W. F. Bolton (henceforth Wrenn and Bolton), G. Jack and M. Swanton (see n. 17).
[46] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', pp. 509–10.
[47] Niles, 'Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*', p. 925.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Howlett's examination of the Proem is essentially convincing, and although his analyses of chiastic patterns at times include verbal echoes that seem merely coincidental, the patterns he describes do appear to be operating in the poem. His efforts to include every possible verbal echo may actually undercut his endeavour, for by including the less convincing along with the more obvious, he ends up weakening his argument. The passage introducing Beow is a case in point, for although Niles's construction and Howlett's essentially mirror each other, Niles's is both simpler and more convincing. Describing simpler patterns with stronger, more exact verbal repetitions makes a stronger argument, as well as one that is easier to follow.

As Howlett moves on to the first numbered fitt (53–114), he is in larger company, as several critics have found this fitt to demonstrate important numerical and chiastic properties. Hart divides the fitt into three sections: lines 53–63 detailing Hrothgar's genealogy, lines 64–85 dealing with the building of Heorot, and 86–114 introducing Grendel. As Hart points out, these divisions are reflected by editorial paragraphing.[48] Hart goes on to point out that each section is introduced by similar wording, and the line sums of the three sections (11-22-29, or taking the first two sections together, 33-29) demonstrate relevant numerical properties for Hart's structural scheme of the poem as a whole.[49] He concludes by pointing out that the whole fitt is framed by an envelope pattern, *longe þrage* (54) and *lange þrage* (114), a point picked up and expanded on by Constance Hieatt, who sees a double envelope pattern operating on the level of the entire fitt, enclosing chiastically the Creation Lay.[50] Ward Parks has detailed this chiasmus surrounding the central Creation Lay, though he does not deal with the larger envelope patterns operating in the fitt.[51]

Howlett's own analysis of this fitt agrees with his predecessors in some ways, but there are interesting departures. He begins by noticing what is essentially a double envelope pattern framing the entire fitt, picking up on the *longe þrage* first observed by Hart and Hieatt and including the correspondence in number between Healfdene's four children and the four kinds of monsters begotten by Grendel's ancestor, an observation first made by Hieatt.[52] He maintains the first division of the fitt recommended by Hart, after line 63, but from there his divisions differ from both Hart and common editorial practice. He takes lines

[48] Hart, 'Ellen', p. 273, n. 22; in my own survey of editorial practices, Klaeber, Dobbie, Heyne-Schücking, Chickering, Wrenn and Bolton, Jack and Swanton all agree, though Wrenn and Bolton do not begin a new verse paragraph at the beginning of the fitt.

[49] *Ibid.* pp. 273–5; see the earlier discussion of Hart's overview of the poem (nn. 29 and 30).

[50] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', pp. 249–51.

[51] Parks, 'Ring Structure', p. 248.

[52] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 250.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

64–79 as a chiastic section dealing with the construction of Heorot, and sees the next segment as occurring between lines 80 and 110. Like his predecessors he sees the Creation Lay (90b–98) as forming the centre of a chiasmus surrounded by references to men living in joy (*dream*), further surrounded by references to Grendel as *gæst*;[53] it is in how he further embeds that sequence that he differs. His reasons for extending the chiastic pattern from 80–110 seem weak, as do the chiastic correspondences he notes beyond lines 86–104,[54] and his sectioning of the poem seems to have more to do with a specific way he wants the numbers to come out as he starts dividing sections according to the Golden Section, than they do with the correspondences contained in the text. All this seems unnecessary, especially after considering that his main observation, that the Golden Section of the entire fitt falls at line 90, the beginning of the Creation Lay, ends up losing force rather than standing as a compelling piece of evidence, largely because it becomes lost in a sea of unconvincing numerical manipulations.[55]

Editors commonly divide fitt two into four sections, with divisions after lines 125, 143 and either 163 or 169.[56] Howlett sees in the first of these sections (115–25) a chiasmus while Bartlett sees an envelope pattern;[57] their analyses appear essentially compatible. From this point there are differences among critics. Hieatt and Bartlett see a large envelope pattern beginning in the next section (lines 126 and 129, respectively) and extending into the opening lines of the next fitt (line 193).[58] Tonsfeldt observes a chiasmus extending from the same place (129b) through line 149a.[59] Howlett's scheme, at least beyond the opening section already discussed (115–25) appears somewhat complex. He divides the fitt into seven sections, but they do not form a clear ring structure:

A (115–25)
B (126–134a)
C (134b–146a)
B^1 (146b–150b)
C^1 (150b–167)

[53] *dream* (88b, 99b); *gæst* (86a, 102a). *Ibid.* p. 250 and Parks, 'Ring Structure', p. 248.
[54] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 512.
[55] *Ibid.* p. 513.
[56] Jack breaks the narrative after line 169; Chickering after 163; Heyne-Schücking, Wrenn and Bolton and Swanton all break it at both 163 and 169. As for the earlier division, Swanton alone breaks the narrative at 146b rather than 143. Klaeber and Dobbie, however, divide the fitt into only two paragraphs, breaking it after line 163.
[57] Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern', p. 11.
[58] *Ibid.* p. 24; Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 263, n. 17.
[59] Tonsfeldt, 'Ring Stucture in *Beowulf*', p. 447.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

D (168–81)
A^1 (183b–188)

A, already discussed, contains its own chiasmus, and A^1 consists of two parallel proverbs, but B and B^1 must be taken together to form a chiasmus, though they are separated from one another; similarly with C and C^1. Section D forms its own chiasmus, but with the opening and closing lines forming a complicated parallelism.[60] This scheme seems unnecessarily complex, and the chiastic pairs are not always strongly linked. The sections themselves, other than the first one (115–25), do not correspond to either editorial paragraphing or the observations of other critics, and Howlett's scheme is no more compelling than those suggested by others, such as the longer envelope pattern noted by Bartlett and Hieatt, or the longer chiasmus suggested by Tonsfeldt, which occupies three of Howlett's sections (B, C and B^1). Interestingly, although Howlett diagrams out this rather complicated scheme of interlocking chiastic correspondences, he does not make any observations regarding numerical properties in this fitt. This may be because the Golden Section of seventy-four (the line total for this fitt) falls either after line 142 or 160, not particularly remarkable places in anyone's scheme.

Howlett considers the next two fitts in much less detail, regarding them as a pair rather than as complete structures on their own, as he views the Proem and the first two fitts. He describes their narrative content in just two sentences, then concerns himself with noting verbal echoes between fitts 3 and 4 and fitts 11 and 12, to which he considers them parallel in his larger scheme for the first part of the poem (fitts 1–14).[61] Others, however, have more to say. Klaeber and Jack divide fitt three into three sections: the first, a short one (189–93), corresponds to the end of the envelope pattern noted by Bartlett and Hieatt;[62] the remainder of the fitt is broken after line 228. Dobbie, Heyne-Schücking and Chickering create four sections, adding a further division after line 209; Wrenn and Bolton make five sections, incorporating the previous divisions and breaking the fitt further after line 236; and Swanton utilizes six, adding a break after line 216. Hieatt sees the majority of the fitt (after the conclusion of the envelope pattern at line 193 and before the closing envelope of the coast guard's speech at 237) as falling into three sections: the entry of the hero (194–207), the sea voyage (208–28), and the coast guard's sighting of the strangers (229–36).[63] Hieatt's scheme corresponds fairly well with editorial practice, and she observes further that the sea voyage passage has its own

[60] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', pp. 514–16.
[61] *Ibid.* p. 520.
[62] See n. 58.
[63] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 263, n. 17.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

envelope; Niles too has remarked on the chiastic patterning of the sea voyage section, which he specifies as lines 205–28.[64] The final section of the fitt, the coast guard's challenge (237–57), has merited a fair amount of attention from critics. Bartlett noted an envelope pattern,[65] which Hieatt describes in greater detail;[66] Tonsfeldt sees the passage as half of a ring structure mirrored in the first part of Beowulf's reply (258–72).[67]

While not discounting Tonsfeldt's identification, I would additionally describe the coast guard's Challenge as a chiasmus centring around the coast guard's praise of Beowulf (247–251a). His reference to movement on the Danish shore constitutes the innermost ring (243b; 253a), his reference to the seafaring of the strangers makes up the middle ring (239–240a; 254b), and his demand to know who the strangers are comprises the outermost ring (237; 257b). This design also encompasses the envelope structure noted by Bartlett and Hieatt. Further, I would designate the sea voyage as a twelve-line passage (217–28) flanked on either side by passages twenty-eight (189–216) and twenty-nine (229–36) lines long. This shorter designation for the sea voyage passage includes only the actual voyage and not the preparing of the ship as Hieatt's and Niles's sectioning does. Thus the fitt is centrally focused on the sea journey, with the opening lines, recounting Hrothgar's inner torment over the situation with Grendel, looking back to the previous fitt, and the closing lines, encompassing the coast guard's challenge, looking forward to the next fitt.

Fitt 4 has garnered little attention from Howlett or any other critic. Editorial practice is almost unanimous. Klaeber divides it into three sections, the first encompassing Beowulf's reply to the coast guard (258–85), the second giving the coast guard's reply to Beowulf (286–300), and the third describing the Geats marching to Heorot and including the coast guard's parting words (301–19). Dobbie follows suit, as do Heyne-Schücking, Chickering, Wrenn and Bolton, Jack and Swanton. The only editor differing at all is Swanton, who adds an additional break at 272b, breaking Beowulf's speech at the point he first broaches the subject of Grendel. The only section of this fitt that has merited any critical attention is the first part of Beowulf's reply, which opens the fitt, which, as noted previously, Tonsfeldt sees as the second part of a chiasmus mirrored in the coast guard's initial challenge.[68]

Howlett sees the next three fitts, 5–7, as paralleled in fitts 8–10; other than noting some correspondences between these fitt pairs (5 and 8, 6 and 9, and 7

[64] Niles, 'Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*', p. 925.
[65] Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern', p. 24.
[66] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 253.
[67] Tonsfeldt, 'Ring Structure in *Beowulf*', p. 445.
[68] *Ibid.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and 10) he does not deal with them in any real detail.[69] Neither does anyone else; Klaeber and Swanton divide fitt five into three sections: the first, a description of the Geats marching (320–331a), the second, the verbal exchange at the door (331b–355), and the third consisting of Wulfgar relaying Beowulf's message (356–70). Dobbie also constructs three sections, but breaks the fitt at two different places: after lines 339 and 347, the ends of Wulfgar's and Beowulf's speeches, respectively. Heyne-Schücking and Chickering place Klaeber's first two sections into one but keep the last section; Jack too maintains the last section but breaks the first two after line 332 rather than in the middle of 331 as Klaeber does, preferring to begin the second section with Wulfgar's actual words. Wrenn and Bolton too follow Klaeber's divisions though like Jack they break the first section after line 332; they also further divide the last section after line 360. I prefer Klaeber's sectioning as the most straightforward; I would also note that the second section can be further subdivided into three smaller segments of almost equal length: the first, Wulfgar's speech, is 8.5 lines long (331b–339), the second, Beowulf's speech (340–7), is eight lines long, the third, Wulfgar's (348–56), is also eight lines long.

Fitt 6 receives no critical attention. Common editorial practice[70] divides it into just two sections, the first giving Hrothgar's reply to Wulfgar and Wulfgar's speech to Beowulf at the door (371–98), and the second detailing Beowulf's move inside and his subsequent speech to Hrothgar (399–455). Chickering and Wrenn and Bolton make one further division within the second section, separating Beowulf's move inside (399–406) and his speech to Hrothgar (407–55). Swanton adds paragraphing at 389b (separating Hrothgar's speech from Wulfgar's), and divides Beowulf's speech into three, breaking it at 426b and 441, creating six sections in all. Fitt 7 is typically divided into two sections, the first, Hrothgar's reply to Beowulf (456–90), much longer than the second, the beginning of the banquet (491–8).[71] The only editor to differ is again Swanton, who creates four sections, adding paragraphing at 472 and 479 to break Hrothgar's speech into three. I would note that the first of Swanton's divisions divides Hrothgar's speech into two movements of nearly equal length, the first focusing on his past association with Beowulf's father (456–72), and the second concerned with the current situation with Grendel (473–90); the first is seventeen lines long and the second eighteen. The Golden Section of the fitt also falls at the point where Hrothgar's speech shifts focus. The last section, detailing the beginning of the banquet (491–8), has drawn some critical attention, as both Bartlett and Hieatt see it as the first part of an

[69] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 521.
[70] Klaeber, Dobbie, Heyne-Schücking and Jack.
[71] Klaeber, Dobbie, Heyne-Schücking, Chickering, Wrenn and Bolton and Jack all agree.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

envelope pattern enclosing the Breca episode.[72] Hieatt's scheme is even more complex than Bartlett's, extending back to line 480; she also notes an internal envelope pattern running from 481–95.[73]

Fitt 8 splits neatly in half as the first thirty lines (499–528) encompass Unferth's introduction and his taunting of Beowulf, and the second thirty lines encompass the first part of Beowulf's retort (529–58);[74] common editorial practice reflects this sensible division.[75] Only Swanton adds an additional break at 548b, the point at which Beowulf's speech shifts its focus from Beowulf and Breca to Beowulf alone. Fitt 9 is one of the longest fitts in the poem, and common editorial practice divides it into three sections: the remainder of Beowulf's retort (559–606), a banquet scene focused on Wealhtheow and Beowulf (607–41), and a concluding banquet scene, this one focused on Hrothgar's leaving of the hall (642–61).[76] Klaeber makes one further division, setting off lines 607–10, which are concerned with Hrothgar's favourable reaction to Beowulf's response to Unferth; Dobbie and Swanton incorporate this division also, as well as additional breaks unique to them: Dobbie at 651, setting off Hrothgar's address to Beowulf, while Swanton breaks the remainder of Beowulf's speech (at 569b, 581b and 590) and separates out Beowulf's speech to Wealhtheow (at 628b). The opening lines of the two banquet scenes (607–612a; 642–646a) form the second and third parts of the triple envelope Bartlett and Hieatt see operating here (the first part, 491–8, came at the end of fitt seven); the first and second enclosing the Breca episode and the second and third framing the exchange between Wealhtheow and Beowulf.[77]

Fitt 10 has received little critical attention, but it contains some marvelous juxtapositions that are worth noting. Editorial practice is somewhat varied in its sectioning of this fitt; Klaeber makes only one division, at 702b, thus dividing the fitt into two unequal portions, the first, and larger, focused on the warriors in the hall preparing for battle, and the second dealing with the approaching monster. Heyne-Schücking, Chickering and Wrenn and Bolton make no division at all; Dobbie and Jack break the fitt in an altogether different place, after line 670, thus beginning the larger section with Beowulf's disarming scene. Swanton divides the poem into four sections, the first and last each containing

[72] Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern', p. 22; Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', pp. 254–5.
[73] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 254.
[74] This is noted by Howlett; see 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 521.
[75] Klaeber, Heyne-Schücking, Chickering, Wrenn and Bolton and Jack. Dobbie incorporates the first division (after Unferth's speech), but not the second at line 358; since Dobbie does not indicate fitt divisions there is no break at all until the end of Beowulf's speech (after line 606).
[76] Heyne-Schücking, Chickering, Wrenn and Bolton and Jack.
[77] Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern', p. 22; Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', pp. 254–5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

an important contrast. The first (662–74) deals with preparation for the night, contrasting Hrothgar's preparation for bed (662–8) with Beowulf's preparation for battle (669–74). The second is comprised of Beowulf's speech to his warriors (675–87) and the third focuses on the waiting warriors (688–702a). The fourth section turns to the approach of the monster, juxtaposing an image of Grendel's advance (702b–703) with the sleeping Geats (704–705a) and with the waiting Beowulf (705b–709). This sectioning emphasizes the contrasts present in the fitt, not only within the first and last sections but between the second and third sections, building tension for the approach of the monster in the next fitt.[78]

Howlett views the next two fitts, 11 and 12, as a pair constituting a large chiasmus centring around the near destruction of Heorot (771–782a).[79] Niles constructs an almost identical ring structure around the same centre (771–782a).[80] Niles's diagram is simpler than Howlett's, but except for the lesser detail in the interior rings, the two schemes are the same, even including the three-part parallelism in the outermost ring. As for editorial practice, for the most part, editors do not break either fitt into smaller segments.[81] The large chiasmus pointed to by both Howlett and Niles is certainly convincing; however, there may be another, smaller chiasmus operating on the fitt level. It is possible to divide fitt 11 as follows:

710–27	Outside the hall: the coming of Grendel	
728–36	Grendel surveys the hall	
737–45	Beowulf watches / Grendel attacks	(9 lines)
746–57	Beowulf meets Grendel's attack	(12 lines)
758–66	Grendel and Beowulf	(9 lines)
767–782a	Hall	
782b–790	Outside the hall: the Danes	

While not negating the operation of the larger chiasmus detailed by Niles and Howlett, this smaller chiasmus can also be seen to function.[82] The two outer rings detail a movement from the outside in and back out again, and there

[78] My own analysis of this fitt was confirmed by Swanton's divisions.

[79] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 521.

[80] Niles, 'Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*', p. 925.

[81] Klaeber, Dobbie, Heyne-Schücking, Chickering, Wrenn and Bolton and Jack all keep fitt 11 as one segment; Klaeber does the same with fitt 12 while Dobbie and Jack break it at line 809 (thus delineating the section focused on the wrenching of Grendel's arm), whereas Heyne-Schücking, Chickering and Wrenn and Bolton do so at 825 (thus separating the last section focused on Beowulf's pleasure). Swanton alone breaks each fitt multiple times dividing fitt 11 into six sections (at 720, 734b, 758, 767 and 782b) and fitt 12 into three (at 794b and 823b).

[82] While the first part of this chiasmus is not reflected in Swanton's sectioning of this fitt, the second part, beginning with line 758, is.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is a nice symmetry in the centre and innermost ring. Bartlett also noted an envelope pattern operation in 767–70.[83]

Fitt 13 has drawn a great deal of attention from critics, and for the most part their analyses of this fitt all agree. Klaeber divides this fitt into four sections, the first covering the journey to the mere (837–52), the second the song of the scop and the story of Sigemund (853–97), the third Heremod (898–915), and the fourth the return to Heorot (916–24). Jack follows suit exactly, while Dobbie, Heyne-Schücking, Chickering and Wrenn and Bolton make one additional division at line 864, effectively separating the praise of Beowulf from the subsequent story of Sigemund.[84] Swanton adds a fifth break at line 874b, thus emphasizing the exact beginning of the Sigemund digression. Bartlett first remarked on the double envelope pattern operating in this fitt as references to riding frame passages praising Beowulf (853–856a, 864–867a and 916-17a); she also noted that the entire fitt is enclosed in an envelope pattern based on references to morning (837–40; 917b–924).[85] Hieatt picks up on Bartlett's observations and extends the envelope further;[86] Howlett expands these framing envelope patterns into a full-blown chiasmus surrounding the scop's song of Sigemund and Heremod:

837–841a Morning
862–3 Hrothgar
864–867a Horses racing
871b–874a Beowulf
874b–900 Sigemund
901–913a Heremod
913b–915 Beowulf
916–917a Horses racing
917b–920a Morning
920b–924 Hrothgar[87]

Howlett goes on to describe the Sigemund passage as a complicated pattern of chiasmus framing a parallelism;[88] it may be simpler merely to observe that

[83] Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern', p. 9.
[84] Heyne-Schücking also emphasizes the break at line 916 by leaving one line of white space in addition to the paragraphing.
[85] Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern', pp. 20–2.
[86] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', pp. 251–2.
[87] This diagram is my own representation of what Howlett describes in 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 517.
[88] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', pp. 518–19. This is also where Howlett finds the poet's 'signature' or dedicatee; the name 'Æðelstan' embedded between lines 887 and 888; see 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 540, and n. 90 below.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the passage is framed by its own envelope pattern consisting of the repeated references to 'ellendædum' (876; 900) and 'Wæls' (877; 897), and that there are significant verbal echoes both within the passage (particularly the reference to Fitela's presence and absence; 879; 889) and linking it to the following Heremod passage. Howlett goes on to note links between this fitt and fitt 2, which he considers a pair.[89] I would also note that the Lay of Sigemund consists of two parallel passages[90] of thirteen lines each; the following Heremod story is also thirteen lines long.[91] The instructive contrast between the two tales is highlighted by the opening lines of each passage, the first introducing *Sigemunde[s] ellendædum* ('the heroic deeds of Sigemund' – 875–6); the second beginning with the phrase 'siððan Heremodes hild sweðrode, e[a]foð ond ellen'.[92] The entire fitt is eighty-eight lines long; the Golden Section falls at line 870b in which the scop *word oþer fand / soðe gebunden* ('devised other words', 'correctly linked'), an apt place.

Fitt 14 has received somewhat less critical attention; Hieatt has observed the envelope pattern (concerned with Grendel's hand) that frames the fitt,[93] an observation that Howlett too makes.[94] Howlett goes on to note some numerical properties of the sixty-six line fitt, namely that the opening line, beginning *Hroðgar maþelode* (925) is echoed in the central, thirty-third line, *Beowulf maþelode* (957).[95] Howlett goes on to consider verbal echoes within and between the two speeches; he notes that Hrothgar's speech opens and closes with reference to God as *Alwealdan* (928) and *Alwalda* (955), and that in his speech Beowulf too refers to God twice, as *Metod* (967 and 979). However, this 'echoing' is somewhat problematic. Beowulf's references to *Metod* do not frame his speech, and Hrothgar uses several other terms to refer to God other than *Alwalda*: *God* (930b), *Hyrde* (931b), *Drihtnes* (940a),

[89] *Ibid.* pp. 519–20.

[90] The passages (874b–887 and 888–900) begin with references to Sigemund as 'son of Waels' (877) and 'atheling's son' (888), then his 'feuds and crimes' (878) and 'fearsome deed' (889) are mentioned, followed by a reference to the absence of Fitela (880 and 889), a mention of swords (883 and 890), then the dragon (886 and 891), and finally the hoard (887 and 894). Howlett's 'signature' is found at the break between these two passages: 'he under harne STAN / ÆÞELinges bearn' (887b–888a).

[91] This is, it should be noted, fitt 13.

[92] 901–2: 'King Heremod's glory declined with his might and courage.'

[93] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 252.

[94] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 514.

[95] This is also where most editors break the fitt (Klaeber, Dobbie, Heyne-Schücking, Chickering, Wrenn and Bolton, Jack and Swanton); they also start a new verse paragraph at 980 with the final image of the hand as seen through the eyes of the warriors. Heyne-Schücking and Wrenn and Bolton make one additional break, separating the first three lines of the fitt from Hrothgar's speech proper; Swanton makes his third break at 946b, the point at which Hrothgar states his desire to treat Beowulf as a son.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and *Ealdmetod* (945a). In fact, Hrothgar refers to God six times, and always in reference to how God has saved his people through Beowulf's deed, thanking God, and wishing God's blessing on Beowulf and his kin. This is the focus of Hrothgar's speech; Beowulf's speech, however, focuses on Grendel, and his references to Metod refer to how God did not wish for Grendel to die in Beowulf's grip (contrary to what Beowulf wished), and how Grendel must await God's judgement. Beowulf's speech, in fact, is concerned with the incomplete success of Beowulf's victory (he was not able to kill Grendel outright), and this emphasis functions as a kind of foreshadowing to the next movement of the poem.

In Howlett's scheme, this fitt ends the first third of the poem (which focuses on the battle with Grendel), and it ends with a close-up look at the hand on the hall. This 'hand on the hall' has been an ordering motif since the end of fitt twelve when Beowulf places the hand on the roof (833b–836). Fitt thirteen begins with the footprints at the hall (837–841a) and ends with the hand on the hall (918b–920a), and in both instances many warriors are coming to see these tokens. In fitt 14, men gazing at the hand open and close the fitt: Hrothgar in the opening and the assembled warriors in the closing, and as the men gaze, we get a close-up look (almost like a camera panning) at the gruesome, bloody hand. From this point on, Howlett's analyses, and those of other critics, encompass larger and larger sections of text. The next pattern in Howlett's scheme encompasses four fitts (15–18);[96] similar schemes by other critics cover similarly large segments of text: Hieatt's scheme covers the same four fitts (15–18), Tonsfeldt's covers three fitts (15–17), and Bartlett's two (16–17).

All of these schemes centre around the Finnsburh episode. The earliest, and simplest, is Bartlett's observation that the Finnsburh episode (1063–1162a) is framed by an envelope structure consisting of references to the scop singing and the noise in the hall (1063–8; 1159b–1162a).[97] Hieatt expands on Bartlett's observation, noting a series of envelopes, perhaps better termed chiastic rings, surrounding the episode. The innermost is the reference to the scop observed by Bartlett, then the treasure-giving scenes (1020–55; 1192–214), and then the outermost ring, the banquet scenes (1008b–1019; 1232–50).[98] Howlett's chiasmus spanning fitts 15–18 encompasses the series of envelopes surrounding the Finnsburh episode pointed to by Hieatt and Bartlett, as well as including more

[96] There is a problem here with Howlett's discussion, as the text states that he is constructing a design that covers the next three fitts (15, 16 and 17), but his diagram clearly covers four fitts, according to the line numbers and a careful reading of his argument. One assumes typographical errors are operating here; see 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 522.

[97] Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern', pp. 22–3.

[98] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 255.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

details.[99] Again, some of the strongest chiastic echoes (the original scop envelope pointed to by Bartlett, the treasure-giving scenes, the banquet references) tend to get buried through Howlett's over-development of this chiasmus, and the whole segment could benefit from a clearer, simpler presentation than either Howlett or Hieatt provide.

Howlett describes the Finnsburh episode itself as a chiasmus with a double centre consisting of the forced treaty (1095) and the funeral of the Danes (1107).[100] Tonsfeldt has constructed a similar chiasmus covering the Finnsburh episode as well as some surrounding material,[101] but the two structures do not wholly agree. Both schemes are difficult to decipher, though for opposite reasons: Howlett's is enormously detailed where Tonsfeldt's is deceptively simple. The centre of Tonsfeldt's scheme is the funeral pyre, but includes as well the narrative material up until the sword is laid in Hengest's lap (1114b–1145); this large centre falls several lines after what Howlett determines to be the kernel of his chiasmus, and the general vagueness of Tonsfeldt's description makes the exact composition of his ring structure somewhat indistinct. Both structures fail to be completely convincing, Tonsfelt's due to its imprecision and Howlett's due to the large number of weak connections it depends on, but the possibility of a chiastic structuring of some kind remains open.[102] There is enough general agreement between the two schemes, as well as the much stronger evidence of chiastic framing devices discussed earlier, to suggest this.[103] Owen-Crocker's account of this chiasmus, which is based on Tonsfeldt's,[104] provides a simpler and clearer account of his scheme,[105] and she brings to the fore the way the references to uncles and nephews (1017–19; 1163–5) frame the chiasmus around the placing of the uncle and nephew together on the funeral pyre, an image which serves as not only the chiastic centre but the emotional centre of the episode.[106]

After the Finnsburh digression, the narrative moves on to the second major

[99] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 522; Howlett's scheme also includes the envelope surrounding Wealhtheow's speeches, which in turn surround the gift-giving scene. See Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', pp. 254–5.

[100] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 523.

[101] Tonsfeldt, 'Ring Structure in *Beowulf*', pp. 449–51.

[102] The lack of agreement regarding the exact location of the centre of this chiasmus makes the significance of some of Howlett's calculations regarding the Golden Section suspect; see 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 524.

[103] In addition, the sectioning of the text practised by these critics is supported by general editorial practice; see Klaeber, Dobbie, Heyne-Schücking, Chickering, Wrenn and Bolton, Jack and Swanton.

[104] As she acknowledges; see Owen-Crocker, *Four Funerals*, p. 202.

[105] Owen-Crocker, *Four Funerals*, p. 204.

[106] *Ibid.* p. 202.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

fight, the battle with Grendel's mother. In Niles's tripartite scheme, this entire section (fitts 19–25) is a large ring structure centring on the struggle in the mere; Howlett views the same segment of text in two parts: an 'introductory' section covering fitts 19–20, followed by the larger segment focusing on the encounter between Beowulf and Grendel's mother (21–5). Howlett sees the shorter, preliminary segment (fitts 19–20), as a chiastic pair centring on two long passages dealing with the aftermath of Grendel's mother's attack on Heorot. The first covers the fact of Beowulf's absence and the removal of Grendel's arm (1299b–1309); the second, which crosses the fitt boundary, concerns the summoning of Beowulf and the first part of Hrothgar's speech relaying the death of Æschere (1310–1326a). The chiasmus is an awkward one, centring as it does on two relatively long sections of text that are not clearly delineated as separate passages, and though there are verbal echoes between the two passages, and in the surrounding framing rings, they are often inexact or consist of terms repeated with some frequency in this episode. The inner sections in particular (the ninth and tenth rings of Howlett's diagram)[107] often repeat elements out of order and rely on some tenuous connections. Further, Howlett's sectioning of the text seems arbitrary and does not correspond well to the narrative divisions reflected in common editorial practice,[108] and his scheme for this portion of the text is not supported by the work of any other critic. In fact, Parks has constructed a smaller, much simpler ring structure covering the first part of fitt 19 (1251–80), which Howlett's scheme cannot encompass.[109] Similarly, the envelope pattern Bartlett sees functioning in the opening lines of fitt 20 (the contrastive references to Æschere; 1323b–29) is not accounted for in Howlett's scheme.[110] All these problems with Howlett's scheme for these two fitts are compounded by the fact that he provides a diagram, but no discussion whatsoever.

Niles deals with these two fitts in only the most general way, seeing the night featuring the surprise attack of Grendel's mother (fitt 19; 1251–309) as mirrored in the subsequent, uneventful night after the great battle in the mere (fitt 25; 1799–1802a), the dawn emergence of the men (1310–20) as corresponding to the sunset retiring of the warriors (1789–98), and the set of speeches after Æschere's death (Hrothgar to Beowulf and Beowulf to Hrothgar – 1321–96) as

[107] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', pp. 524–5.

[108] See Klaeber, Dobbie, Heyne-Schücking, Chickering, Wrenn and Bolton, Jack and Swanton.

[109] This smaller ring structure centres on the family history of the Grendelkin (1260–76), surrounded by references to Grendel's mother's sorrow (1259–60; 1276–7), in turn surrounded by references to Grendel's mother as avenger (1255–8; 1278), and finally surrounded by an outer ring referring to the sleeping Danes (1251; 1279–80); see Parks, 'Ring Structure', p. 249.

[110] Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern', pp. 10–11.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

parallel to the set of speeches that follow the presentation of Grendel's severed head (1651–1784). While Nile's conception of these passages lacks much detail and he does not discuss specific verbal echoes, his extension of the ring structure out to this boundary (that is, fitts 19 and 25) certainly seems sound, and one wonders why Howlett did not consider the parallel narrative elements that frame the large chiasmus he too sees operating in fitts 21–4.

Howlett's and Niles' versions of the chiasmus operating in these four fitts, 21–4, tally fairly neatly. The majority of the correspondences are exact, and the parallel narrative elements and verbal echoes in both schemes are generally strong. Howlett's scheme is more detailed, particularly in his expansion of the fight scene itself, but the framing elements are quite specific in both Niles's and Howlett's schemes. While no one else has constructed a plan for these fitts on the scale of Niles's and Howlett's, both Bartlett and Hieatt have observed several envelope patterns within these fitts that, for the most part, are either accounted for in the larger schemes or at least not contradicted. Bartlett identifies an envelope pattern enclosing the first part of Beowulf's reply to Hrothgar (1384b–1389)[111] that sections off that portion of the text nicely, and can be encompassed by the larger schemes. She notes a second envelope pattern operating a few lines later, enclosing the warriors' first sight of the monsters in the mere, and the killing of one of those monsters, with verbs of seeing (1425–1441a).[112] This is followed by another envelope starting immediately and extending to the close of the fitt concerning Beowulf's arming himself (1441b–1472);[113] Hieatt picks up on this observation and notes further that the close of this envelope coincides with the close of a larger envelope that encloses the entire fitt (1387–8; 1470).[114]

These smaller patterns detected in fitt 21 by Bartlett and Hieatt can exist within the larger structures envisioned by Niles and Howlett; similarly the patterns they point to in fitt 23 do not contradict anything in the larger schemes. Hieatt notes a large double envelope concerning *seon* and *sweord* that encloses fitt 23 (1557, 1605, 1650)[115] and Bartlett observes a smaller one operating within the fitt consisting of references to the *yðgeblond eal* (1591–622).[116] Again, these smaller patterns can be incorporated into the larger schemes that are, for the most part, fairly general. Howlett does provide more detail for a few sections of text, seeing a smaller chiasmus operating in the prologue to Hrothgar's speech (1687–99), and again in his speech proper (1706b–1724a), and within

[111] *Ibid.* pp. 11–12.
[112] *Ibid.* p. 15.
[113] *Ibid.*
[114] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 252.
[115] *Ibid.* pp. 252–3.
[116] Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern', p. 15.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

these smaller sections Howlett does see numerical proportions operating (the Golden Section),[117] but for the most part his larger structure covering the encounter with Grendel's mother is a large chiasmus similar to Niles's and without numerical features.

This large chiasmus constructed by Howlett ends with the conclusion of Hrothgar's speech at line 1784 (fitt 25).[118] Howlett then skips over 200 lines of text, announcing that the third part of the narrative begins at line 1987 with the beginning of Hygelac's speech (fitt 28). Niles extends his large ring structure covering the same material a little farther, ending around line 1803, but in general the section of text Howlett skips over is little considered by critics interested in diagramming structure. Only Tonsfeldt considers any part of those fitts (26–7), observing a ring structure that covers Beowulf's journey from Denmark to Geatland, and from Hrothgar to Hygelac (1885b–1924). The centre details the sea voyage itself[119] and the outer rings concern the two kings; the inner ring consists of references to the *landweard / hydweard*, the sand, and treasure.[120] It is a rather general scheme, but logical enough, and its function is clear: to move Beowulf from one kingdom to the other, and from one king to the other.

According to Howlett's scheme,[121] the third part of the tripartite narrative begins with Hygelac's speech in fitt 28 and extends through the end of the poem. It consists of a large chiasmus centring on the second and third parts of the dragon fight (2669–87; 2688–93), and encompasses two smaller ring structures that correspond to one another.[122] Niles too constructs a large ring structure to cover the fight with the dragon, although his starts and ends a little sooner than Howlett's (2200–3136) and is generally less complex.[123] His ring structure centres on the slaying of the dragon and Beowulf's death (2550–2845a), a centre that encompasses Howlett's, though it is considerably

[117] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', pp. 527–8.

[118] Note that Hieatt has pointed to a 'minimal' envelope pattern enclosing Hrothgar's 'sermon' in fitts 24–5 (1687–784); see Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 254.

[119] See also Niles's brief discussion of the patterning of the two sea voyages in 'Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*', p. 925.

[120] Tonsfeldt, 'Ring Structure in *Beowulf*', p. 445.

[121] Howlett's identification of fitt numbers for this third part becomes confusing, as what he terms fitt 29, lines 2039–2143, most critics term 29–30. Thus Howlett begins fitt 30 at line 2144, which the majority of scholars consider fitt 31, and his numbering of fitts is off by one through the final fitt, which Howlett terms 42 instead of 43. In order to avoid confusion, from this point on I will use line numbers whenever possible and if it becomes necessary to identify a fitt by number, I will use the standard numbering system, but include line numbers as well.

[122] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', pp. 528–9.

[123] Niles, 'Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*', pp. 927–9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

larger.[124] From there, however, the correspondences between the two schemes grow fewer. Niles's innermost ring pairs Beowulf's approach to the barrow before the fight with the dragon (2538–65) with the Geats' approach to the barrow after the fight (2845b–2859); Howlett's scheme does not isolate these sequences and does not pair the lines encompassing them. Niles pairs the two short speeches of Beowulf (2510–37) and Wiglaf (2862–91) which frame the central encounter with the dragon; Howlett does not, pairing instead Beowulf's speech with his final speech (2792b–2820), and Wiglaf's speech with his final speech (3076–109). Niles then sees the two longer speeches focusing on the Swedish–Geatish hostilities as a larger ring, the first speech given by Beowulf (2425–509), the second the so-called 'messenger's prophecy' (2900–3027). Though both speeches are accounted for in Howlett's scheme, it is difficult to tell exactly how they correspond due to the enormously complex series of ring structures Howlett sees framing the central episode; this is true for the rest of the corresponding pairs from Niles's ring structure: the two journeys to the barrow (2397–416, 3028–46), the two accounts of the hoard (2231b–2266, 3047–109), and the two riflings of the barrow (2221–2231a, 3120–36).

While the simplicity of Niles's scheme is appealing, it is not always strongly founded. The majority of his correspondences are based on narrative repetitions founded on action rather than actual verbal echoes, and some are stronger than others. His linking of the two long speeches concerning the Swedish–Geatish animosity certainly appears sensible and obvious, but his decision to link Wiglaf's last speech to the Lay of the Last Survivor, rather than to Wiglaf's earlier speech reproaching the warriors who abandoned Beowulf, as Howlett does, seems arbitrary (though the same could be said of Howlett's decision). Nor is Howlett's structure without its problems. He provides a diagram but almost no discussion, and close examination of his representation reveals some weaknesses. The series of smaller ring structures within the larger chiasmus makes the chain of correspondences difficult to follow, and many pairings seem to have little to recommend them. The outer ring, matching Beowulf's speech to Hygelac (1987–2143)[125] with the final fitt (3137–82), seems to be one of convenience rather than true correspondence, and at least in this case Niles's preference for a pairing of the final fitt with the unnumbered proem seems to make much more sense.

Rather than focusing on the overall structure of the Geatish portion of the poem the work of the other critics mentioned here has coalesced around

[124] Niles observes that the structuring within the central episode, though basically linear, demonstrates a patterning focusing on threes; see 'Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*', p. 927.

[125] Howlett does not attempt to discuss or map out Beowulf's long speech to Hygelac, nor does any other scholar under consideration.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

four areas: the Lay of the Last Survivor, the account of Hygelac's death, the Father's Lament, and the final fitt of the poem.[126] Bartlett points to an envelope pattern encompassing the 'Lay of the Last Survivor' (2247–66) but she provides no discussion;[127] certainly there is much to warrant sectioning off this segment of text. Parks observes a ring structure enclosing this central lay, the innermost ring consisting of references to the Last Survivor speaking in his sorrow (2236–46, 2267–70), the middle ring recounting the hiding of the treasure (2231–6) and its subsequent discovery by the dragon (2270–7), and the outermost ring detailing the arousing of the dragon (2208–20, 2278–87); this outer ring itself consists of a five-part parallelism.[128] Howlett too constructs a chiasmus around this central Lay of the Last Survivor that corresponds exactly at the innermost ring, but less precisely farther away from the kernel episode.[129] A fourth critic to observe some kind of framing device operating around this episode is Hieatt, who notes an envelope pattern, encompassing the entire fitt, which depends on references to *sare gesceod* (2222) and *sare geendod* (2311b).[130] Most recently, Owen-Crocker sees an elliptical structure extending from line 2177 to line 2331 which corresponds for the most part, though not perfectly, with Howlett's.[131]

The Lay of the Last Survivor and the entire story of the hoard is a flashback of sorts, a stepping away from the main narrative that perhaps necessitates the use of framing devices to move out of and then back into the main narrative. Similarly, one critic has focused on the account of Hygelac's death as another digression from the main action that is set up through framing devices of one kind or another. Tonsfeldt sees a simple ring structure operating here as the central event, the battle resulting in Hygelac's death (2363–6), is framed by references to Beowulf's swimming (2360–2, 2367), and they in turn are framed by references to Hygelac's death (2355, 2372).[132] The other critic who considers this episode, as well as the next one to concern critics, the Father's Lament, is Hieatt, who sees all of these digressions as enclosed by what she terms a triple

[126] The clustering of attention around these four points in the poem's final movement may be a function of modern interest in these sections of the poem, whereas different parts of the narrative might interest another audience. Conversely, the 'neatness' of their structure might be responsible for modern interest and appreciation for these sections.

[127] Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern', p. 24.

[128] Parks, 'Ring Structure', pp. 250–1.

[129] Howlett, 'The *Beowulf* Poet', p. 528.

[130] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 253.

[131] Owen-Crocker, *Four Funerals*, pp. 210–11. She does not specifically refer to Howlett in her discussion of this elliptical structure, although she does acknowledge his work elsewhere (see p. 135 and p. 151, n. 20).

[132] Tonsfeldt, 'Ring Structure in *Beowulf*', p. 445; neither Howlett nor Niles accounts for this structure in his larger scheme.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

envelope consisting of recurring references to *fela*, *neðende*, *niða*, *guðe*, *ræsum* and *genesen*. The envelope begins with lines 2349–56 enclosing the account of Hygelac's death, Heardred's death, and Beowulf's support of Eadgils, and ends at line 2397. The narrative resumes at this point, and then the envelope recurs at line 2425 enclosing Beowulf's recollections of Hathcyn's accidental killing of Herebeald and his subsequent epic simile known as the Father's Lament; the envelope closes at lines 2511–12;[133] Tonsfeldt too notes this framing of Beowulf's speech (2426–2427a, 2511–2512a).[134]

Critical attention lapses somewhat through the rest of the poem until the final fitt.[135] Hart observes an envelope pattern encompassing the entire fitt,[136] and Hieatt defends his identification.[137] Carrigan examines the pattern of the entire fitt, describing the 'structural symmetry . . . (as) unequalled,' from a six-line introduction (3137–42) followed by three paragraphs of almost equal length (13-13-14) describing Beowulf's funeral. The first focuses on the flames of the funeral pyre and the grief of the 'Geatish woman' (3143–55), the second on the building of the barrow and the confining of the treasure beneath (3156–68), and the third on the summation of Beowulf's deeds and assessment of his heroic character (3169–82).[138] Carrigan's observations seem sensible, and it is rather surprising that Howlett does not give more attention to this final fitt. He does, however, look at some numerical ratios of the third part of the poem (lines 1987–3182 in his scheme of the poem's structure), observing that the Golden Section of the final third of the poem falls at line 2444, the first line of the Father's Lament. He does not discuss the significance of this fact, apparently feeling that it can stand on its own, like so much else in his presentation.

CONCLUSION

My goal here has been to situate numerical theories of the poem's structure, with particular attention to Howlett's application of theories of Biblical style to

[133] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 254.

[134] Tonsfeldt, 'Ring Structure in *Beowulf*', p. 446.

[135] There are a few small exceptions as Hieatt observes two fitt-enclosing envelope patterns in fitts 35 (2460–1, 2599–600) and 36 (2605, 2691); see Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 253, and Bartlett notes another enclosing the final account of the hoard (3051–75); see Bartlett, 'Envelope Pattern', p. 28.

[136] Hart, 'Tectonic Design', p. 55, n. 33.

[137] Hieatt, 'Envelope Patterns', p. 251.

[138] Carrigan, 'Structure and Thematic Development', pp. 47–8; at least one of these divisions is borne out by common editorial practice as Klaeber, Heyne-Schücking, Jack and Swanton all break the fitt at line 3156. Swanton has an additional break at line 3169, which also reflects one of Carrigan's divisions; Dobbie, Chickering and Wrenn and Bolton do not break the final fitt.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Beowulf, within a framework of other critical readings. This reference to other scholarship has identified points of critical agreement, particularly at certain sites of the poem where critical interest has tended to cluster: primarily the battles with the monsters and the major digressions such as the Finnsburh episode. While some points demonstrate a decided difference of opinion among scholars, there is a surprising amount of agreement, even among scholars operating from different critical biases.

In general, then, this examination of other scholarship has tended to support Howlett's structural schemes. Howlett's diagrams are frequently much more complex than those of other scholars and at times rely on weak correspondences, but stripped down to their strongest and simplest evidence, Howlett's constructions are often remarkably similar to those of other scholars. It is when Howlett moves into the area of arithmetical ratios between sections of the text he has identified that he moves into a somewhat murkier area. He does not apply his theories uniformly or systematically, and his announcements of structural conformity to arithmetic ratios like the Golden Section seem arbitrary because they are not consistently applied. Thus Howlett calculates where the Golden Section falls for the third part of the poem, but not the first or second, perhaps because the Golden Section does not fall at an important place structurally or thematically in these two parts, assuming that the third part does in fact do so.[139] Similarly, Howlett determines the Golden Section of the whole poem, excluding the unnumbered Proem, to fall at line 1987, the first line of Hygelac's speech and the beginning of Part Three of the poem. A very neat coincidence, but Howlett opens himself up to charges of circular reasoning here, as one is left wondering exactly what his basis is for determining that Part Three begins with this line – are there thematic grounds, or is his determination based solely on the numbers? If the underlying principle is thematic, then the choice of the opening of Hygelac's speech as the beginning of the third and final section of the poem appears questionable, as it could more properly be seen as a conclusion to the Grendel part of the narrative. If numerical disposition of verse lines is the basis of this division, then his manipulation of the numbers – his exclusion of the Proem and decision to divide fitt 29–30 into two fitts precisely at line 1987, in spite of the fact that there is no break in the manuscript at that point – seems dubious.

Instances like this leave open the question of whether the numerical limits of Howlett's structures depend on thematic concerns or are constructed with

[139] The Golden Section of Part One falls at either 411 (an insignificant portion of Beowulf's first speech to Hrothgar) or 633 (part of Beowulf's speech to Wealhtheow), and the Golden Section of Part Two falls at 1371b (part of the Grendelsmere passage referring to the stag) or 1606b (the melting of the giant sword).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

an eye to mathematical proportion, irrespective of structural division that makes sense in terms of the narrative movement of the poem. One could, for instance, just as easily calculate the Golden Section for the entire poem including the unnumbered Proem and determine that it falls at line 1966b, the moment at which Beowulf and his men first set foot on the Geatish shore again. This seems at least as significant a place in the poem as the opening line of Hygelac's speech, but arguing from strictly thematic grounds, one might find the major division in the poem to come at the point in which the narrative jumps fifty years to the time when Beowulf is king and the dragon is awakened, at line 2200 – but at this juncture of the poem, there is no clear ratio (Golden Section or any other) operating. Even Howlett has changed his mind on this score, as he once preferred to divide the poem not at line 1987, but at line 1962, the beginning of fitt 28 and the entry of Beowulf and his men to Geatland.[140]

Greater attention to other scholarship focused on the structural patterning of *Beowulf* as well as to questions of procedure reveals that Howlett's analysis of the poem's structure, while often supported by past and current scholarship and at times compelling, is not uniformly successful. By far the strongest section of his work is his analysis of the Proem and the first fourteen fitts, where his demonstration of a series of tightly bound chiastic segments is well-supported by other scholarship, frequently demonstrates clear mathematical proportions of symmetry or the Golden Section, and, while often cluttered with detail, is based on strong correspondences of both narrative elements and verbal repetitions. His work on the remainder of the poem, however, particularly the final third, is weaker. His structural analyses here are less often in accord with other scholarship, explanations are frequently either brief or simply absent, and mathematical proportions are only sporadically demonstrated, and when they are they are often based on questionable divisions of the text. In the final third of the poem, it becomes increasingly apparent that Howlett is operating without a clear methodology, and without applying criteria in an even manner. While sections of analysis stand up well, overall, Howlett cannot be said to have demonstrated adequately that Biblical style, as he defines it, is plainly operating throughout the entirety of the poem.

A COROLLARY: WHAT ABOUT READERS?

There is, however, enough agreement among different assessments of the poem's structure to determine that most critical readers do perceive the poem to divide into smaller segments, and they largely agree on where those main divisions in the narrative fall. Thus, episodes and digressions are seen to be

[140] See 'Form and Genre in *Beowulf*', pp. 322–3 and 325.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

delineated from the main narrative, and the main narrative itself is felt to divide into different sections (the monster fights). Instances of chiasmus and parallelism are frequently recognized, both those determined by verbal echoes and those determined by narrative action, as is their function of demarcating episodes and, when two similar moments are juxtaposed, highlighting difference. Readers can perceive patterns in the text such as ring structures, envelope patterns, and symmetry, and may even be sensitive to different lengths of related sections in a general way if the sections are relatively small – for instance, two contrasted passages may be observed to be of approximately the same length, or one may be felt to be longer than the other – but the proposition that readers can perceive ratios as exact as that of the Golden Section in the relative length of sections, sometimes sections several hundred lines long, is one at which many critics balk.

This problem of the reader's perception of mathematical ratios in the text is one that has been dealt with in a variety of ways by the advocates of numerical composition. Howlett responds by asserting in a general way that such things are indeed possible, as they 'can be apprehended by ear as well as by eye in the counting of lines, words, and syllables',[141] but he does not elaborate in any specific way how a reader could apprehend a structure as large as the Golden Section ratio encompassing the entire poem of *Beowulf*, for example.[142] Others simply ignore the question, or allow the presence of such ratios to stand as proof in and of themselves: in other words, if such ratios are present, then that presence indicates that readers and/or listeners must have been able to understand them. The problem is simply that we have forgotten how. Yet asking modern readers to simply 'take it on faith' that the first audiences of the poem could indeed recognize such ratios is not a satisfactory way of dealing with the problem of perception.

Another response to the difficulty of readers' ability to distinguish such patterns in the text takes evidence from the domain of visual perception and applies it to that of textual structures. Most advocates of numerical composition make this gesture, but the most fully elaborated study is Robert Stevick's examination of texts and illuminations in early manuscripts.[143] Stevick takes as

[141] Howlett, epilogue to *British Books*, p. 618.

[142] This also brings up the problem of how readers of the poem could count verse lines since the manuscript of the poem does not divide the poem into lines. T. E. Hart has answered this particular objection by pointing out that 'poetic form is independent of scribal format. The unique manuscript records the poem in prose format, but this transmission in no way militates against the autonomy of the verse-line; in all but the rarest cases the limits of the verse-lines are unambiguously established by metric, alliterative, and syntactic determinants' ('Tectonic Design, Formulaic Craft, and Literary Execution', pp. 49–50, n. 17). If one considers listeners rather than readers, then the scribal format of the poem becomes irrelevant.

[143] R. D. Stevick, *The Earliest Irish and English Bookarts*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

his starting point the observation that both the 'art of depiction and [the] art of metered speech . . . in the early Insular (Irish–English) tradition make use of forms comprising structural relationships that can best be understood as representations of mathematically defined proportions'.[144] In the succeeding chapters Stevick examines illuminations and texts,[145] demonstrating the ratios they exhibit and providing detailed reconstructions of the process of constructing them. Perception of such patterns is not a preoccupation for him, as his author-centred method of proceeding, with its concern for *how* such designs were constructed, bears witness.[146] When he does concern himself with such questions, it is with reference to the perception of the visual arts: 'It can not be explained, but it is a fact that areas of geometrically well-defined proportions are more pleasing or more beautiful to man than those of arbitrary proportions.'[147] He then applies these observations to the forms present in verse texts, without defending the validity of such transference: 'In concept, their forms are of the same kind that are manifest in the divisions of several verse texts and in the shapes of some of the finest full-page illuminations that adorn some of them.'[148]

Such equating of the forms of visual art with textual structures is problematic, and Stevick's own observations here are somewhat contradictory. He begins by noting that people can perceive and construct visual manifestations of the Golden Section, such as the Golden Rectangle, with remarkable accuracy,[149] and then he makes the leap to the perception of such structures in texts: 'Such precision of the intuitive recognition of the golden ratio – to one part in a thousand – is apparently adequate, then, for registering dimensions of the order represented in the poem's length by linecount.'[150] Stevick is not

[144] *Ibid.* p. 1.

[145] *Andreas*, *Christ II*, *Elene*, *The Phoenix, Christ III* and *Guthlac A*.

[146] Stevick, *The Earliest Irish*, p. 13.

[147] J. Tschichold, 'Non-Arbitrary Proportions of Page and Type Area', *Calligraphy and Paleography*, ed. A. S. Osley (London, 1965), p. 180; qtd. reference to Stevick, *The Earliest Irish*, p. 91.

[148] Stevick, *The Earliest Irish*, p. 91.

[149] *Ibid.* pp. 129-30; Stevick quotes W. S. McCulloch, 'What's in the Brain that Ink may Character?', *Embodiments of Mind* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), pp. 395–6, to support his contentions regarding the seemingly innate ability of human beings to recognize and construct figures based on the Golden Section. Similar claims are made by H. E. Huntley, who notes the recurrence of the Golden Section in art, music and architecture from the ancient Greeks through modern times and observes its prevalence in nature (including the human body). He points to psychological studies in which people demonstrated a preference for shapes constructed according to the Golden Section (Huntley cites A. Zeising, *Der goldene Schnitt* [1884], Fechner [1876], Witmar [1894], Lalo [1908], and Thorndike [1917] here). Using Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, Huntley suggests that the preference for this particular ratio is due to an unconscious response to an archetypal form. See H. E. Huntley, *The Divine Proportion: a Study in Mathematical Beauty* (New York, 1970), esp. chapter 5.

[150] Stevick, *The Earliest Irish*, p. 130.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

particularly interested in the reader's perception, however, and he introduces these claims not to argue that readers and/or listeners can perceive these ratios in the structures of texts, but rather to argue that authors construct such ratios purposefully, rather than intuitively. When he turns to this line of reasoning, he observes that apprehension of the Golden Section 'is known to exist only in visual terms' and that 'there is no evidence yet in hand that the ratio can be apprehended in any other mode of perception'.[151] Perhaps the most telling part of Stevick's work is the simple fact that he does not apply these theories of structure to *Beowulf*, in this work or any other[152] – in spite of the fact that he has spent a great deal of time examining the text and manuscript of the poem, even producing his own edition and arguing for an unconventional way of reading the manuscript.[153] The difficulty of the reader's perception of mathematically determined proportions in the relative lengths of sections of text remains a problem that has not been adequately addressed by theories of numerical composition.

One further problem with such mathematically based theories is that none of them can adequately account for the fitt structure of the poem. As the preceding examination reveals, the segments of text into which the narrative is seen to divide sometimes coincide with fitt divisions, but sometimes not. We have the marvelously clear conclusion of fitt 14 (line 990), for example, which is almost universally felt to mark the end of the entire Grendel portion of the narrative, but we also have the conclusion of fitt 35 (line 2459), which comes just two and a half lines before the end of the section of text known as the Father's Lament, interrupting the poem's only epic simile and disrupting the flow of the narrative, when just twelve lines later (2472) there is a clear stop in the narrative.[154] Even more problematic are the fitt divisions occurring at 1740 and 2039, which occur in the middle of sentences. Advocates of numerical composition frequently deal with this problem by delineating larger sections of text that cross fitt boundaries, and while readers may feel that such larger

[151] *Ibid.*

[152] His 1992 article, 'Representing the Form of *Beowulf*', *Old English and New: Studies in Language and Linguistics in Honor of Frederic G. Cassidy*, Garland Reference Lib. of the Humanities, vol. 1652, ed. J. H. Hall, N. Doane and D. Ringler (New York and London, 1992), 3–14, explores the analogy of interlace used to describe the structure of *Beowulf*; it does not deal with mathematical ratios between structures in the poem.

[153] His edition, *Beowulf: an Edition with Manuscript Spacing Notation and Graphotactic Analyses* (London, 1975) makes note of differences in spacing between words and letters in the manuscript, arguing for phonological relevance, a question explored by his earlier monograph, *Suprasegmentals, Meter, and the Manuscript of Beowulf* (The Hague, 1968).

[154] It is generally true that the first part of the poem demonstrates fitt boundaries that coincide with narrative breaks, whereas the latter part of the poem demonstrates less accordance; it is also true that the patterns seen in the text tend to be larger in the last part of the poem.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sections do better accord with the narrative flow of the poem, this is essentially ignoring the way the text is actually demarcated in the manuscript, and in many ways demonstrates another kind of 'rewriting' of the text.

Stevick addresses this problem in his work, noting that 'coincidence of sectional divisions in the manuscripts with a putative form, where it occurs, is often taken as confirmation, while lack of coincidence is ignored or is deftly dismissed through such adverbs as "usually" or "normally," allowing the sectional divisions otherwise to be explained impressionistically as scribal stints, authorial stints, lections, and the like.'[155] Thus the fitts of *Beowulf* are said to 'usually' coincide with narrative and thematic units of the poem, and the fitt structure itself is said to correspond to periods of writing, reading, or performing. The various 'stints' mentioned by Stevick refer to several theories that have been proposed to explain the sectional divisions of some manuscripts as marking places where the performer, scribe, reader, or author would stop.[156] Several such theories have been proposed to explain the fitt structure of *Beowulf* specifically as both scribal[157] and authorial,[158] as based on reading[159] or oral performance,[160] and even as based on appearance.[161] Stevick's own solution to the 'problem' of just what the sectional divisions of manuscripts 'go with'[162] is that they don't go with anything – they exist simply for their own sake, creating a form based on mathematical proportion that is related to the kinds of ratios

[155] Stevick, *The Earliest Irish*, p. 2.

[156] *Ibid*. p. 235. This is in spite of the fact that at two points in the narrative, lines 1740 and 2039, the fitt junctures occur in the middle of sentences.

[157] H. Bradley identified them as relics of the numbering of parchment leaves which scribes copied from; see his 'The Numbered Sections in Old English Poetical MSS', *PBA* 7 (1915–16), 165–87. See also W. W. Greg's response to Bradley in *The Library*, 4th ser. 1 (1920), 58–61, and Bradley's reply, *The Library*, 4th ser. 1 (1920), 121–2.

[158] See F. Klaeber, introduction to *Beowulf*, pp. c-ci, E. Dobbie, introduction to *Beowulf and Judith*, pp. xxiv–vi, and C. L. Wrenn, ed. *Beowulf with the Finnesburg Fragment* (London, 1953), pp. 10–11; B. J. Timmer referred to them as 'units of composition according with the "momentary inspiration of the poet"' (p. 322); see 'Sectional Divisions of Poems in Old English Manuscripts', *MLR* 47 (1952), 319–22.

[159] See M. Förster, 'Die Beowulf-Handschrift', *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, philologisch-historische Klasse 71 (1919), 1–89, esp. 87, and G. Shepherd, 'Scriptural Poetry', in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. E. G. Stanley (London, 1966), pp. 1–36. It should be noted, however, that Shepherd described the 'rationale of the divisions [as] . . . not at all clear' (p. 23) in *Beowulf*.

[160] For two opposing views, see E. Werlich, 'Der westgermanische Skop, der Aufbau seiner Dichtung und sein Vortrag' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Münster, 1964), pp. 104–85 and 326–59, who related the fitts to the requirements of oral composition, and J. B. Bessinger, '*Beowulf* and the Harp at Sutton Hoo', *Univ. of Toronto Quarterly* 27 (1958), 148-68, who felt the fitts were not related to oral performance.

[161] D. M. Wells, 'The Sections of Old English Poetry', *YES* 6 (1976): 1–4.

[162] Stevick, *The Earliest Irish*, p. 235.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

exhibited by manuscript illustrations of the time.[163] As to why poets would place such structures in their poems, 'The most probable reason . . . is simply that his tradition directed him to proceed that way.'[164]

Stevick is speaking of Old English poetry in general, but similar observations have been made regarding *Beowulf*. Hart has observed that 'most often . . . the thematic structure and the quantitative structure of the text do, in fact, coincide. But this correspondence is not necessary.'[165] For Hart, as for Stevick, the structures exist for their quantitative properties, and sometimes the poet structured the narrative units of the poem so that the two agree. 'But whether the length of the fits is determined by thematic pauses or not . . . the fact remains that it need not be.'[166] Yet this too is not a wholly satisfactory resolution to the problem of the uneasy fit between the fitt divisions of the manuscript and the narrative 'pauses' of the poem, as the question of 'why?' still remains. Assuming that the line lengths of fitts are pre-determined according to some mathematical scheme,[167] and that sometimes the poet structured his narrative to coincide with that scheme, why did he not do so consistently? Or, alternatively, if the correspondences are random, the result of chance, then why do they correspond so often?

No solution proposed to the problem of the sectional divisions of the manuscript has so far been found to be satisfactory, and the rationale behind their disposition remains unclear. Lacunae in the manuscript represent another difficulty that cannot be said to have been solved, for the response that the fact of numerical proportion demonstrates that the linecount is as intended by the poet is open to the charge of circular reasoning.[168] Similarly, the problem of readers' perceptions of the mathematical ratios observed in the text has not been solved, and as such the implication such proportions have for readers is questionable. Even if, as Howlett suggests, such proportions were detectable to an earlier audience of the poem, and it is not clear whether Howlett envisions listeners or readers at this point, the fact remains that modern readers do not perceive them. The contention that even modern readers may sense them 'intuitively', and that this perception is registered in their sense of pleasure in the structure of the poem at these points, is not an argument that can be

[163] *Ibid.* esp. p. 237.
[164] *Ibid.* p. 13.
[165] Hart, '*Beowulf*: a Study of the Tectonic Structures and Patterns', p. 21.
[166] *Ibid.* p. 22.
[167] It should be noted that unless Hart's scheme is accepted, no scheme to account for the disposition of lines into fitts has been found adequate.
[168] This issue of lacunae has been raised numerous times; see for example Niles's reply to Hart, objecting that 'the unique manuscript of *Beowulf* is written out as prose and contains lacunae (e.g. at lines. 240, 289–90, 403, 1803, and 2792). We do not know how many lines have been lost.' 'Patterning in Beowulf, Continued', 872.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press

verified with any certainty. It is also questionable whether readers' enjoyment of the poem is increased by knowledge of the presence of such mathematically derived ratios in the poem, as Howlett implies.

This corollary considers the larger question: what do mathematical patterns of structure mean in the abstract, particularly from the perspective of the poem's reader or listener? The earlier sections of this examination, however, turned to the poem itself and looked at what patterns scholars have found in the text. The explanations for those patterns may indeed be 'ingenious and complex' as Andy Orchard remarked, perhaps even 'overly ingenious,' as he found the contributions of Hart and Howlett to be, referring specifically to their theories regarding the significance of the fitt-numbers. [169] But the fact remains that patterns are there. What we make of them remains an open question.[170]

[169] A. Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 91, 97. See esp. his chapter 'Style and Structure', pp. 57–97.

[170] This article began life as chapter 2 of my dissertation 'The Inner *Beowulf*: Theories of Structure and Composition of the Poem and Their Implications for Modern Readers' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Univ. of California, Davis, 2001) prepared under the direction of M. Osborn. I am grateful to the University of California, Davis for a Graduate Dissertation Fellowship in Summer 2000 and a Dissertation Year Fellowship in 2000–1 which assisted me in writing the dissertation, and to Ramapo College for their support with a summer stipend in 2005 enabling me to update my work and prepare this article.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675109990093 Published online by Cambridge University Press