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The distal demonstrative as discourse marker in *Beowulf*

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The literature on the distal demonstrative *se* in Old English has mainly concentrated on its use as a marker of definiteness (referent identifiability) and deixis. In this article, I focus instead on demonstrative uses that have received much less attention in previous work. Drawing on data from *Beowulf*, I argue that the distal demonstrative determiner also serves a variety of discourse-pragmatic functions, such as indicating the relative importance of referents; topic continuity; or chapter boundaries.

1 Introduction

Demonstratives, like definite articles, convey definiteness; and like adverbs such as *here* or *there*, they also express deixis. The latter meaning is usually considered to be their defining characteristic: 'Demonstrative pronouns and demonstrative adjectives, like the English "this" and "that" ... are primarily deictic' (Lyons 1977: 646). However, demonstratives may convey other meanings besides definiteness and deixis, as shown in studies of languages other than English (see, for example, Yulong 1987; Kirsner & Van Heuven 1988; Lichtenberk 1988; Grenoble 1994; Herring 1994; Keusen 1994, amongst others). In particular, these studies have shown that demonstratives often possess discourse-pragmatic functions relating to broad narrative-level considerations, such as the topicality or importance of referents.

This article[1] will examine the use of the Old English distal demonstrative determiner *se* in *Beowulf*. I will show that, in addition to its more commonly recognized meanings (deictic distinctions and definiteness), determiner *se* is also used to indicate episode boundaries, topic continuity, or the importance of a participant in the narrative context. While *se* typically occurs with referents that are presumed to be familiar or identifiable (definite) in some manner, referent identifiability is neither necessary nor sufficient for determining when *se* will occur in the text. Noun phrases referring to clearly identifiable participants often appear in *Beowulf* with no demonstrative (or with no determiner at all); moreover, determiner *se* occasionally occurs in NPs whose referents are not identifiable.

The article is organized as follows: section 2 describes the data that will be analyzed here and provides some basic background on the Old English distal demonstrative; section 3 discusses the use of *se* to convey the relative importance of referents, comparing its usage with both major and minor participants; section 4 shows that

[1] I would like to thank David Denison and two anonymous ELL referees for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to William H. Tucker for his suggestions on revising section 4 and, especially, for his help with the statistical analysis. Any errors that remain are my own responsibility.

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Table 1. *Forms of* se *in Old English*

	singular		plural	
	masculine	feminine	neuter	(all genders)
nominative	se	sēo	þæt	þā
accusative	þone	þā	þæt	þā
dative	þǣm	þǣre	þǣm	þǣm
genitive	þæs	þǣre	þæs	þāra
instrumental	þȳ		þȳ	

the demonstrative determiner can indicate the topicality of a referent, especially topic persistence over a portion of the text (in the sense of Givón 1983); section 5 demonstrates that *se* can serve as a marker of chapter boundaries, often occurring in noun phrases appearing at either the end of a chapter or the beginning of a new one; finally, section 6 concludes the article by presenting a summary of the findings along with some questions for future research.

2 Background considerations

It is not clear exactly when the *Beowulf* manuscript, from which the data in this article are drawn, was composed. According to Bjork & Obermeier (1997: 13), some scholars favor a relatively early date (c. 650–800), while others date the text to the late ninth or early tenth centuries (see Bjork & Obermeier 1997 for detailed discussion). I have chosen to examine this particular text because '*Beowulf* appears to represent, in respect of the article, an older stage than any other literature in the Old English period' (Christophersen 1939: 86). The demonstrative determiner *se* ultimately developed into the definite article *the* in English;[2] because of the relatively archaic nature of the language of *Beowulf*, we should expect *se* to display properties that are maximally different from those of Modern English *the* (as well as *that*). A detailed analysis of the earliest stages of English demonstrative (and article) usage may help cast new light on their modern counterparts.

Most scholars argue that there are no articles yet in Old English (see, for instance, Traugott 1992: 171–3, Philippi 1997: 84–8, van Gelderen 2007: 297; for a dissenting view, see Christophersen 1939: 86, 92). The main Old English demonstratives are the proximal *þes* 'this' and the distal *se* 'that'. The latter is inflected for five cases, in three genders and two numbers (see table 1 for the different forms of *se*). Mitchell (1985: 128–35) describes two uses of *se*, independent (i.e. pronominal) and dependent (i.e. a noun modifier); this article focuses only on the discourse functions of *se* in its dependent use, that is, as a determiner.

[2] While many scholars hold this view, it is by no means unanimous. For instance, Millar (2000) argues that the English definite article was borrowed from Old Norse.

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With respect to their semantic and pragmatic functions, Diessel (1999: 2) defines demonstratives in general as 'deictic expressions ... primarily used to focus the hearer's attention on objects or locations in the speech situation ... demonstratives are often used to keep track of prior discourse participants'. Similarly, most previous work on the Old English demonstratives concentrates on their deictic and definite uses, as well: 'The functions of the two OE demonstratives ... may be defined respectively as specifying and deictic. The first merely particularises, singles out from the generality, indicates and identifies the known and expected' (Quirk & Wrenn 1957: 69).

The variety of terms employed here (and elsewhere) to describe the concept of definiteness ('particularise', 'single out', 'identify') is typical. There is an extensive literature on definiteness and the terminology found in these works is not consistent (see, for example, Christophersen 1939; Hawkins 1978; Du Bois 1980; Heim 1982; Kadmon 1990; Gundel, Hedberg & Zacharski 1993; Lyons 1999; Epstein 2001; Abbott 2004). For the purposes of this article, we will say that a DEFINITE noun phrase is one whose referent is IDENTIFIABLE. A referent is identifiable if the addressee is able 'to distinguish it from all other individuals in the universe of discourse' (Lyons 1977: 179). Several sorts of factors may lead a speaker to assume that the addressee can identify a referent and, thus, to employ a formally definite NP (e.g. a pronoun, an NP with a demonstrative or a definite article) when speaking about that referent. The principal factors that may justify an assumption of identifiability are: first, the referent has already been mentioned in the prior discourse; second, it is physically present in the speech context; or third, it constitutes common knowledge amongst the members of a speech community (e.g. *the President*, *the cat next door*).

Studies of Old English *se* naturally focus on its well-known use as a marker of definiteness: 'It shows the same variety of uses as MnE "the/that". Thus it may point forward ... or back ... It may refer to something which has already been indirectly introduced ... or to something for which the reader must rely on outside knowledge' (Mitchell 1985: 133). In *Beowulf*, as elsewhere, *se* is indeed nearly always employed in noun phrases whose referents are identifiable (more precisely, 98.2 percent of NPs with *se* in *Beowulf* refer to entities that are identifiable in some way):[3]

(1) (a) Ða wæs hāten hreþe Heort innanweard
Then was ordered quickly Heorot interior
folmum gefrætwod; fela þǣra wæs,
hands adorned many of those was
wera ond wīfa, þē **þæt wīnreced**,
men and women who the wine-hall
gestsele gyredon. (991–4)
guest-hall prepared
'Then the order was given for all hands to help to refurbish Heorot immediately:
men and women thronging **the wine-hall**, getting it ready.'

[3] All examples are cited from the Klaeber (1950) edition of *Beowulf*, which is also available online at www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/beowulf-oe.html. The modern English versions are based on the translations by Chickering (1977) and Heaney (2000).

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(b) Nō þæs frōd leofað
Not this wise lives
gumena bearna, þæt **þone grund** wite. (1366–7)
of-men children that the bottom knows
'No man alive, though old and wise, knows **that mere bottom**.'

In (1a), the *wine-hall* is identifiable because it has previously been mentioned in the text (the hall is named *Heorot*); in (1b), though the bottom of the lake (*mere*) has not yet been mentioned in the narrative, it is nonetheless identifiable because it is common knowledge that all lakes have a bottom.[4]

This use of *se* with identifiable referents closely parallels the way definites are used in Modern English. At the same time, though, many scholars have noted that the distribution of *se* frequently diverges from Modern English patterns. For instance, Mitchell writes: 'there is no regular correspondence between OE and MnE usage. *Se* is found where we would not use "the/that" … It can be absent where we would use "the/that"' (1985: 134–5). And Traugott (1992: 172) remarks of *se* that: 'In many ways it covers the domains of both the demonstrative *that* and the definite article *the* in PDE. However, there are some differences … *se* is often not present where an article or demonstrative might be expected in PDE. This is especially true of the early poetry.' These differences between Old and Modern English can be seen in *Beowulf*:

(2) (a) Swylce hē siomian geseah segn eallgylden
also he hang saw banner all-golden
hēah ofer **horde**, (2767–8)
high over hoard
Ða ic on hl**æ**we gefrægn **hord** rēafian,
then I in barrow heard hoard rob
eald enta geweorc ānne mannan (2773–4)
old giants' work one man
'He also saw a golden standard hanging over (the) **hoard** …
Then, as I've heard, a certain man, alone in (that) barrow,
plundered (the) **hoard**, old work of giants'

(b) Hūru **Gēata lēod** georne truwode
indeed Geats' man readily trusted
mōdgan mægnes, Metodes hyldo. (669–70)
brave might God's favor
'And (the) **Geatish man** trusted completely in his proud strength and God's favor.'

In (2a), the *hoard* (and the *barrow*, too) had already been mentioned several times in the preceding text (one such prior occurrence, from line 2768, is shown here, as well), but the NP *hord* (line 2773) does not occur with *se* in the Old English version; in contrast, the Modern English version does require some determiner, either *that* or *the*. In (2b), the *Geatish man* in question is Beowulf, who has of course been mentioned

[4] This type of inference has been called, amongst other things, BRIDGING (Clark & Haviland 1977) or INDIRECT ANAPHORA (Erkü & Gundel 1987).

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many times in the story by this point and is easily identifiable. Nevertheless, *se* does not occur in this NP.

Though the existence of such differences between Old English *se* and Modern English *that/the* is well known, they have yet to be studied in detail. One goal of this article is to explain some of these differences. I will argue that it is not possible to account for the distribution of the demonstrative determiner *se* using the sole criterion of identifiability. As we will see in section 3, there are some cases in which Old English NPs with non-identifiable referents occur with *se*. And, more importantly, it was very common in Old English – unlike in Modern English – for noun phrases with identifiable referents to occur without any determiner at all (see the examples in (2) above). At this (early) stage in the history of English, it appears that the preference is for an NP to have no determiner (in effect, this is the default case). Christophersen (1939: 87), in discussing the use of *se* in *Beowulf*, notes 'there is a certain aversion to using the word very often in the poem. The zero-form standing for something definite is exceedingly common.' Indeed, *Beowulf* consists of 3182 lines, yet by my count, there are only 379 occurrences of *se* as a determiner,[5] a relatively low number, especially in light of the extremely high frequency of *the* in Modern English. For determiner *se* to occur in early English poetry (at least, as exemplified in *Beowulf*), its referent should generally have some other properties besides simply being identifiable. The remainder of this article is devoted to describing and analyzing aspects of the discourse structure, beyond identifiability, that are relevant to the use (or omission) of determiner *se*.

Before moving on, a brief mention should be made of another factor that is sometimes claimed to be relevant for the use of *se*, namely, meter (see, for example, Christophersen 1939: 86). In this view, the demonstrative determiner may be used because an extra syllable (or two) is needed to make a line fit one of the allowable metrical types. While it is possible that metrical considerations do influence some uses of *se*, I have not found any examples in *Beowulf* where the stress pattern alone is responsible for an occurrence of the demonstrative (Christophersen, for instance, does not cite any). In contrast, it is easy to find examples of *se* that cannot be explained at all in terms of meter, as seen in the contrast between (3a) and (3b):

(3) (a) Siððan **þā fæhðe** fēo þingode; (470)
afterwards that feud fee settled
'Later, I settled **the feud** by paying'

(b) þæt hit sælīðend syððan hātan (2806)
that it sea-farers afterwards name
'that ever after sailors will call it'

[5] In my text count, I have excluded the roughly two dozen adverbial uses of *se* (for example, line 974 *nō þȳ leng leofað* 'nor the longer live' or line 1502 *nō þȳ ær in gescōd* 'not the sooner penetrated') since no referent is present in these cases. I have also excluded two occurrences of *se* that are difficult to interpret, one because it appears in a fragment where part of the original text is missing or illegible (line 2230) and one ambiguous case where scholars do not agree which noun the demonstrative modifies (line 1015; see note in Klaeber 1950: 169).

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The first half-line in (3a) contains a noun phrase with *se*, but the demonstrative is not needed there merely because of the stress pattern. If it had been omitted, the resulting half-line (*Siððan fǣhðe*) would still be a metrically permitted type, as shown by the parallel half-line in the second part of (3b), *syððan hātan*. Meter, therefore, does not play any role here; more likely, this occurrence of the demonstrative – like the other examples discussed in this article – is motivated by the meaning it conveys. The 'feud' mentioned in line 470 is identifiable because it is the same one introduced eleven lines earlier, in 459 (*Geslōh þīn fæder* ***fǣhðe mǣste*** 'Your father brought about a great feud'). In fact, it appears that every token of the demonstrative determiner in *Beowulf* can be explained in semantic/pragmatic terms, so that there is no need to invoke the notion of meter in this regard.

3 Importance of the referent

One factor that influences the choice of *se* is the relative importance of the referent of a noun phrase. This possibility was raised by Christophersen, who noted that 'the extended use of the resumptive pronoun is only found with the chief characters and localities or things belonging to them' (Christophersen 1939: 87). And in *Beowulf*, the more important a referent is in the overall narrative context, the more likely it is to occur in NPs with *se*. In other words, the demonstrative determiner occurs most frequently in NPs referring to MAJOR PARTICIPANTS, that is, the ones that play the most important roles in the story; MINOR PARTICIPANTS,[6] i.e. less important characters, tend to occur more often in NPs without any determiner. Evidence for this tendency is given in table 2, which lists the five participants mentioned most frequently by means of NPs taking *se*. These NPs make up nearly one-third of all occurrences of the distal demonstrative determiner in *Beowulf* (32.7 percent); it is not surprising to find that the three most frequent referents represent the main characters (Beowulf, the dragon and Grendel) and that the fourth most frequent referent with *se* represents the setting where much of the action takes place (Heorot). By way of illustration, the character Beowulf is variously referred to as *se gōda* 'the good (man)' (line 205), *se eorl* 'the nobleman' (1512), *ðæs hildfruman* 'the war-chief' (2835), with each NP containing a form of the distal demonstrative determiner.

One might argue that *se* occurs more often in the aforementioned NPs not because these participants are more important, per se, but simply because they are the most common NPs in the text (presumably because they refer to major participants). This objection seems wrong, however, because high-frequency nouns referring to minor participants rarely occur with *se*. For example, according to Bessinger & Smith (1969: 339), the most common noun in *Beowulf* is *Gēata* 'Geat' (the tribe to which Beowulf belongs, in genitive plural form). This noun appears 39 times in the text, but never with *se* (it also appears twice in the nominative/accusative singular form *Gēat*, five

[6] The terms *major* and *minor participant* are borrowed from Wright & Givón (1987: 10).

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Table 2. *Participants occurring most frequently in NPs with* se[7]

	Number of occurrences	%
Beowulf	45	11.9%
the dragon	26	6.9%
Grendel	21	5.5%
Heorot (Hrothgar's hall)	18	4.7%
Hrothgar	14	3.7%
top 5 total	124	32.7%
total occurrences of *se*	379	100%

times in the dative plural *Gēatum*, and once in the dative singular *Gēate*, without *se* in all instances). The noun *Gēat* is used here mostly to refer to the Geatish people, usually in phrases of the sort *Gēata dryhten* 'lord of the Geats' (as in line 1831; for another example with *Gēata*, see (2b) above), in which the referent 'Geats' is identifiable (having been mentioned many times previously) but not a major participant in the story. In comparison, Modern English genitive NPs like *the Geats* routinely occur with a definite article in similar contexts, regardless of the importance of their referents.

Minor participants typically do not occur in NPs with *se*, even after the participants have been introduced into the story and become identifiable. To illustrate further, let us look at the noun phrases employed to refer to a specific minor participant, namely, the watchman who guards the coast in the service of Hrothgar, the Danish King, and whom Beowulf and his men encounter when their ship first lands on the Danish shore. As expected, the first mention of the watchman in the text does not include *se*:

(4) Đā of wealle geseah **weard Scildinga**,
then from wall saw guard Shieldings
sē þe holmclifu healdan scolde,
he who sea-cliff hold should
beran ofer bolcan beorhte randas, (229–31)
bear over gangway bright shields
'When from the wall, (the) **Shieldings' lookout** whose job it was to guard the sea-cliffs, saw shields glittering on the gangplank'

However, the next two lexical NPs[8] referring to the watchman do not use *se*, either, even though the character is now identifiable. At this point in the story, Beowulf and his men have come ashore and have explained to the guard who they are and why they

[7] There are two plural NPs with *se* that refer to both Beowulf and Grendel. I only counted each of these NPs once (under Beowulf).

[8] Several pronouns are also used to refer back to the watchman.

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are there; the guard then begins his reply to them (5a).[9] Next, the guard escorts them from their ship to meet Hrothgar in his hall (5b):

(5) (a) **Weard** maþelode, ðǣr on wicge sæt,
guard said where on horse sat
ombeht unforht: (286–7)
servant fearless
'Undaunted, sitting astride his horse, (the) **coast-guard** answered'

(b) Him þā **hildedëor** hof mōdigra
them then battle-brave court courageous
torht getǣhte, (312–13)
bright showed
'So (their) **gallant escort** guided them to that dazzling stronghold'

Much later in the story, after Beowulf has accomplished his task and is ready to return home with his men, they go back to their ship and once again encounter the watchman; still, *se* does not appear in the NP *Landweard*:

(6) **Landweard** onfand
coast-guard perceived
eftsīð eorla, swā hē ǣr dyde; (1890–1)
return earls' so he before did
'(The) **coast-guard** spied them, thanes setting forth, the same as before'

Only in the very last full noun phrase referring to the watchman does *se* occur:

(7) Hē **þǣm bātwearde** bunden golde
he the boat-guard bound gold
swurd gesealde, þæt hē syðþan wæs
sword gave that he since was
on meodubence māþme þȳ weorþra, (1900–2)
on mead-bench treasure the worthier
'**The guard** who had watched the boat was given a sword with gold fittings, that later on the mead-bench he was the more honored by that fine treasure'

The example in (7) shows that NPs referring to minor participants are sometimes found with *se*. The demonstrative occurs in some of these cases to emphasize the importance, or DISCOURSE PROMINENCE, of the participant in the local narrative context (as opposed to the global context of the entire story; other reasons for using *se* with minor participants are given in the following sections). A locally important participant

[9] An anonymous referee comments that a demonstrative determiner cannot occur in this context with the noun *Weard* (nor with *Landweard* in (6) below) because of Kuhn's second law, which basically states that, in Old English poetry, a main clause may not begin with a phrase containing an initial unstressed element, such as a demonstrative (Kuhn 1933). However, it should be noted that scholars have challenged the validity of Kuhn's law on both theoretical and empirical grounds, citing exceptions from *Beowulf* and other texts (see Mines 2002 and references therein). But even if we grant that Kuhn's law is valid, this would not affect the argument being made here, namely, that the NPs in question do not require a demonstrative determiner even though the watchman is identifiable. If the *Beowulf* poet had felt that *se* was appropriate in these NPs, he could surely have altered the word order to avoid the constraint imposed by Kuhn's second law.

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plays a prominent role only over a small stretch of the discourse (e.g. a character who accomplishes something especially noteworthy at a specific point in the story). In the context of (7), the watchman is portrayed as a person of special prominence, having performed a noteworthy task (guarding the ship), and he is rewarded for his efforts. The subsequent text confirms the fact that he is an important participant here (though not, of course, within the overall story, i.e. he is not a major participant in *Beowulf*) by explicitly stating that he was 'honored' in later years.[10]

Another set of examples in which *se* serves to emphasize the discourse prominence of a minor participant is shown in (8). In both of these cases, the demonstrative modifies the noun *hafelan* referring to Grendel's head, which was cut off by Beowulf after the fight with Grendel's mother:

(8) (a) Ne nōm hē in þǣm wīcum, Weder-Gēata lēod,
not took he in the abode Weder-Geats' man
māðmæhta mā, þēh hē þǣr monige geseah,
treasures more though he there many saw
būton **þone hafelan** ond þā hilt somod (1612–14)
except that head and the hilt together
'The man of the Weders took no more from those quarters, though he saw treasure there in abundance, except **that head** and the hilt'

(b) þæs ðe ic on aldre gebād,
this which I on life experienced
þæt ic on **þone hafelan** **heorodrēorigne**
that I on the head blood-stained
ofer eald gewin ēagum starige! (1779–81)
over old strife eyes stare
'(praise God) that I came through alive,
so that **this head** dripping with blood, after such strife,
I can look upon with my own eyes at last!'

In (8a), the importance of the head can be inferred from the fact that, despite the presence of many treasures in the cave of Grendel's mother, Beowulf only takes with him the head (along with the hilt of the sword that he used to kill Grendel's mother and behead Grendel's corpse). It is clearly a valuable prize for Beowulf. The lines in (8b) occur as part of a speech given by Hrothgar after Beowulf returns in triumph to Heorot. The king rejoices at the sight of the head and gives thanks to God. The powerful emotions expressed by Hrothgar, as well as the vivid description of the head, support the analysis of the head as discourse prominent here.

As usual, however, these examples of NPs with *se* are not the norm in *Beowulf*. Most mentions of nouns meaning 'head' (*hafela, hēafod*) occur with no determiner in the text, even when the referents are identifiable. Some examples are given in (9):

[10] There is some doubt as to whether the *batwearde* in (7) is the same person as the watchman in the previous examples (see note in Klaeber 1950: 195). The point of the example remains the same, though, regardless of the exact identity of this guard – in any case, it is still a noun phrase with *se* referring to a locally important minor participant.

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(9) (a) Hrā wīde sprong,
corpse widely sprang
syþðan hē æfter dēaðe drepe þrōwade,
when he after death blow suffered
heorosweng heardne, ond hine þā **hēafde** becearf. (1588–90)
sword-stroke hard and him then head carved
'(The) corpse sprang open as he cut deep into it after death, a firm-handed battle-stroke, and chopped off his **head**.'

(b) Þǣr unc hwīle wæs hand gemǣne;
there us-two while was hand shared
holm heolfre wēoll, ond ic **hēafde** becearf
water gore welled and I head carved
in ðām gūðsele Grendeles mōdor
in that battle-hall Grendel's mother
ēacnum ecgum; unsōfte þonan
mighty edge hardly thence
feorh oðferede; næs ic fǣge þā gȳt; (2137–41)
life bore away not-was I doomed then yet
'Down there, for a while, we fought hand-to-hand, the water seethed in blood and I cut off (the) **head** of Grendel's mother in that hall with a mighty sword. I barely managed to escape with my life; my time had not come yet.'

The demonstrative *se* does not occur in these mentions of Grendel's head because no special importance is attributed to them in these contexts. In (9a), the focus of the passage is Beowulf's revenge (by disfiguring the corpse), not the head itself. In (9b), Beowulf is merely recounting the events after he has returned to his home; there is no special focus on the head, nor is it mentioned again.[11]

It is worth pointing out that just as it is not obligatory for *se* to mark all identifiable referents, it is also not obligatory for *se* to appear in all NPs whose referents may potentially be construed as discourse prominent. For instance, Beowulf's companions are depicted in (10) as struggling to carry Grendel's head back to Hrothgar's hall, yet no determiner appears with *hafelan* here:

(10) cyningbalde men
royally-brave men
from þǣm holmclife **hafelan** bǣron
from the sea-cliff head bore
earfoðlīce heora ǣghwæþrum (1634–6)
with difficulty them each
'brave as kings, the men carried (that) **head** away from the cliff.
It was hard going for each of them.'

On the face of it, it might seem that Grendel's head is as central to this scene as it is to the passages in (8). Nevertheless, *se* does not occur here. This state of affairs is not surprising, given that morphemes in the early stages of grammaticalization tend to be

[11] For more examples of identifiable *heads* (other than Grendel's) that occur in NPs with no determiner, see lines 672, 1448, 1521, 2679, 2973, *inter alia*.

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optional; only as they grammaticalize further do they eventually become obligatory (Lehmann 1985). Along these same lines, Greenberg (1978: 61), in defining his CYCLE OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE, argues that '[t]he point at which a discourse deictic becomes a definite article is where it becomes compulsory and has spread to the point at which it means "identified" in general'.

One more way in which the concept of importance influences demonstrative usage can be seen in (11). These examples concern the use of *se* with the superlative form *sēlest* 'best'. In Modern English, NPs with superlatives nearly always require a definite article because they represent unique referents (e.g. *the smartest girl in school* refers to only one girl; see Hawkins 1978: 233–6). In Old English, though, superlatives did not systematically occur with a demonstrative determiner, and in *Beowulf*, many instances of NPs with *sēlest* did not, either, as seen in (11a):

(11) (a) Hafa nū ond geheald hūsa **sēlest** (658)
have now and hold of-houses best
'Guard and hold (this) **best** of houses'

(b) magoþegna bær
young-thanes bore
þone sēlestan sāwollēasne (1405–6)
the best soul-less
'of thanes, she bore away **the best**, now unsouled'

In *Beowulf*, when referring to inanimates (as in 11a), NPs with *sēlest* never take *se*, but all six occurrences of *sēlest* that have human referents do occur with *se* (as in (11b)).[12] This result is consistent with other well-known grammatical phenomena connected with animacy, in which human referents in general are more likely than inanimate objects to receive special grammatical treatment because people are more highly salient – that is, important – in our experience of the world than things (see Timberlake 1977; Comrie 1981).

In addition to these types of importance, *se* can also be used for FORESHADOWING, in which an event or a character is introduced in a manner that calls attention to its importance at a subsequent time. Such cases provide evidence that *se* could occur in Old English NPs whose referents were not yet identifiable. Some examples are shown in (12):

(12) (a) ne wæs hit lenge þā gēn,
not was it long then still
þæt **se ecghete āþumswēoran**
that the sword-hate in-laws
æfter wælnīðe wæcnan scolde. (83–5)
after hostility waken should
'it was still not the time for **the sharp-edged hate** of in-laws to rise in murderous rage'

[12] The other examples with *se* are found in lines 416, 1685, 1956, 2382, 3122; some examples of *sēlest* without *se* are in lines 146, 412, 454, 935, 1144, 2326.

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(b) Đā **se ellengæst** earfoðlīce
then the powerful-demon impatiently
þrāge geþolode, sē þe in þȳstrum bād, (86–7)
time suffered he who in darkness waited
'Then **that powerful demon**, a prowler through the dark, nursed a hard grievance'

Many different formal techniques can be employed to hint at what will happen later in the story. One is the use of *se* to introduce an entity that readers do not yet know about, in order to allude to the future importance of the entity. For instance, in (12a), the compound noun *ecghete* occurs with *se* even though it has not yet been mentioned in the text and cannot yet be identified (Klaeber 1950: lvii and Chickering 1977: 282 both cite this case as an example of foreshadowing). The demonstrative alludes to the destruction of the building, as if we already knew about it. In (12b), the NP *se ellengǣst* provides the first mention of Grendel in *Beowulf*. Since addressees have not yet met him at this early stage of the text, the unusual technique of introducing the character with a formally definite NP foregrounds the important role he will go on to play in the story. Of course, this technique of employing the definite article for foreshadowing purposes can still be seen in modern-day literature.[13]

So the notion of importance influences the use of *se* in several ways. First, major participants, by virtue of their intrinsic importance in the story, are more likely to occur with *se* than minor ones. Next, on a more local scale, an NP may take *se* to indicate that its referent is discourse prominent. Finally, some NPs take *se* to suggest that their referents will be important later on (foreshadowing).

4 Topic persistence

We saw in the previous section that although the distal demonstrative determiner occurs most often in NPs referring to major participants, nevertheless, it does not systematically do so. Major participants do not routinely occur with *se*; even many NPs referring to Beowulf himself take no determiner (recall that NPs with no determiner seem to be the default case in Old English; see section 2). What other factors, besides local discourse prominence, cause some mentions of identifiable major (or minor) characters to take *se*? In this section, I will argue that another discourse function of *se* is to mark highly topical referents.

We may define a TOPIC as 'the participant most crucially involved in the action sequence' (Givón 1983: 8). Givón has identified several characteristics of topics. First, topical participants are mentioned more often than non-topical participants: 'More important discourse topics appear more frequently in the register, i.e. they have a higher probability of persisting longer in the register' (Givón 1983:15). Second, in many

[13] Christophersen (1939: 29) cites some examples, for instance, the first sentence of H. G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*: '**The stranger** came early in February.' Readers have no way of knowing for sure who the stranger is at that point or that he is, in fact, the invisible man of the title, but the definite article calls attention to the character, suggesting that he may be someone of interest.

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languages, 'topical referents are most commonly given special grammatical marking, while non-topical ones are left unmarked' (Givón 1995: 65). The distal demonstrative determiner is one such special marker in Old English.

As Givón has demonstrated, one way to identify topics is to measure PERSISTENCE, or the number of recurrences of a referent in the following text. The more highly topical a referent, the more frequently it should be mentioned again after it is first introduced in a section of the discourse. In several studies, Givón argues that a topic persistence measurement of less than two should be considered low; greater than two is considered high (see Wright & Givón 1987: 23, Givón 1995: 66). In other words, a referent that recurs more than twice in the ten clauses following its appearance in a passage should be considered highly persistent, which is an indication of high topicality. A referent that recurs only once or twice, or never again, is not highly persistent and thus, not a topic.

To see if *se* is used in *Beowulf* to mark highly topical referents, I measured the persistence of the referents of noun phrases with *se* by counting how often these referents recur in the ten lines following every mention of an NP with *se*.[14] A recurring mention of the same referent can take one of several different forms: a lexical noun (either the same noun or a synonymous one), a pronoun, or zero anaphora. Some illustrations of highly persistent topics, where the first in the chain of coreferential mentions is an NP containing *se*, are given in (13):[15]

(13) (a)

			Đā	**se**	**æðeling**	gīong
			then	the	prince	went
þæt	**hē**	bī	wealle	wīshycgende		
that	he	by	wall	wise-thinking		
gesæt	on	sesse;	**Ø**	seah	on enta	geweorc,
sat	on	seat	(he)	saw	on giants'	work
hū	ðā	stānbogan		stapulum	fæste	
how	the	stone-bows		pillars	fast	
ēce	eorðreced		innan	healde.		
eternal	earth-house		within	held		
Hyne	þā	mid	handa	heorodrēorigne,		
him	then	with	hand	sword-gory		
þēoden	**mærne**		þegn	ungemete	till	
lord	famous		thane	without-measure	good	
winedryhten	**his**		wætere	gelafede		(2715–22)
friendly-lord	his		water	bathed		

'So **the prince** went, wise-minded lord, to sit on a seat by the rampart; (he) saw how the arches, giants' stone-work, held up the earthwork, solid forever. Then his loyal thane, immeasurably good, took water in his hand, bathed the bloodied one, (the) famous king, his liege, dear friend.'

[14] Instead of following Givón, who measures persistence over ten clauses, I have confined myself, for practical reasons, to measuring persistence over ten lines. In *Beowulf*, ten lines can be equivalent to only one or two clauses; using ten clauses would, therefore, cover an unmanageable extent, often requiring examination of 50–100 lines of text to measure the persistence of an NP with *se*.

[15] For the sake of brevity, I have not shown all ten lines following the mentions with *se*.

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(b) þæt **ðā līðende** land gesāwon,
that the sea-farers land saw
brimclifu blīcan, beorgas stēape,
sea-cliffs shine hills steep
sīde sænæssas; þā wæs sund liden,
large headlands then was water traversed
eoletes æt ende. Þanon up hraðe
voyage at end thence up quickly
Wedera lēode on wang stigon,
Geats' people on land step
sæwudu **Ø** sældon . . . syrcan **Ø** hyrsedon,
ship fasten shirts shook
gūðgewædo; Gode **Ø** þancedon
war-dress God (they) thanked
þæs þe **him** ȳþlāde ēaðe wurdon. (221–8)
that which them wave-paths easy became
'that **the seafarers** sighted land, sunlit cliffs, sheer crags and looming headlands. The deep sea was crossed, their journey at an end. The troop of Geats went over the side, climbed ashore, and moored their ship. There was a clash of mail and a thresh of gear. They thanked God for that easy crossing on a calm sea.'

In the passage cited in (13a), Beowulf is first mentioned as *se æðeling* 'the prince' (line 2715). In the next line, he is mentioned again in the form of the pronoun *he*; in the following clause, he is understood to be the elliptical subject of the verb *seah* 'saw' (zero-anaphora; line 2717); he is mentioned in 2720 with the pronoun *hyne* 'him'; finally, there are two more recurrences using lexical nouns, both meaning 'lord' (*þēoden* in 2721 and *winedryhten* in 2722). In (13b), the topic is Beowulf's men on their ship as they arrive at the land of the Danes. After they are mentioned with an NP containing *se* (221), they recur several times shortly afterwards, first with a lexical noun (*lēode* 'men' 225), then as the elliptical subjects of the verbs *sǣldon* 'fasten' (226), *hyrsedon* 'shook' (226), and *þancedon* 'thanked' (227), and lastly, with the pronoun *him* 'them' (228).

Overall in *Beowulf*, 28.8 percent of NPs with *se* (109 out of 379) have a persistence value of three or higher (thus, introduce highly topical referents). The average persistence of all NPs with *se* is 1.84. According to Givón's studies, this latter figure falls around the dividing line between high and low topicality. However, it should be borne in mind that this number includes all examples with *se*, even those in which *se* indicates identifiability, discourse prominence or a paragraph boundary (see below), rather than topicality. In these other functions, referents marked by *se* are not generally topical and their rate of recurrence is low, especially with minor participants. For instance, the boat-guard in (7) is only mentioned one more time (with the pronoun *he*) because the passage is not chiefly about him. Rather, it concerns the actions of Beowulf and his men as they prepare to leave (notice that in the main clause in (7), the subject *he* is Beowulf while the boat-guard appears as indirect object, in dative case, suggesting that Beowulf, not the guard, is the main topic). Furthermore, NPs with nouns representing inanimate, abstract or generic referents make up approximately 10 percent of occurrences of *se*

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Table 3. *Persistence of most frequent major characters in NPs with* se

	Number of occurrences	Number of mentions in next 10 lines	Average persistence
Beowulf	45	183	4.07
the dragon	25	67	2.68
Grendel	22	76	3.45
Heorot	18	26	1.44
Hrothgar	14	51	3.64
top 5 total	124	403	3.25

but are rarely topical (persistent). One such example of an inanimate object that does display a high degree of persistence is shown in (14), but this situation is not typical:

(14) Hȳrde ic þæt hē **ðone healsbēah** Hygde gesealde,
heard I that he the neck-ring Hygd gave
wrǣtlicne wundurmāððum, **ðone þe** him Wealhðēo geaf,
splendid wondrous-jewel that which him Wealhtheow gave
ðēodnes dohtor, þrīo wicg somod
chief's daughter three horses together
swancor ond sadolbeorht; hyre syððan wæs
supple and saddle-bright her since was
æfter **bēahðege** brēost geweorðod (2172–6)
after ring-receiving breast adorned
'I heard that he gave Queen Hygd **the necklace** that Wealhtheow gave him, wondrous treasure-ring, and three horses, brilliantly saddled. After that gold-giving, the bright necklace adorned her breast.'

The necklace in 2172 was last mentioned nearly one thousand lines back (line 1216), but occurs with *se* in its first mention here to show that it is a new topic of discussion. As usual, subsequent mentions with a lexical noun (lines 2173, 2176) do not take *se* (nor do those in the examples shown in (13)).

The crucial evidence in support of the conclusion that *se* can indicate high topicality comes from the fact that while references to major characters do not systematically occur with *se* (see section 3), when they do occur with *se* they are highly topical. The persistence of major characters after mentions with *se* is high. As seen in table 3, the average persistence of the most frequently occurring major characters after they are mentioned in an NP with *se* is 3.25. This figure rises to 3.56 if we exclude the inanimate referent, Heorot, from our count and include only the animate referents (the participants most crucially involved in the action). The hall is an important setting but not an active participant in the story, so is naturally less inclined to be a topic.

In (15), I show several more examples of topical major participants introduced with an NP containing *se*. The topic in (15a) is Grendel; in (15b) it is the dragon. Notice again that mentions with *se* are often followed by mentions with no determiner, even though the referents of the latter are clearly identifiable (as if it would be considered redundant to identify the same referent more than once).

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(15) (a) ac **se ǣglǣca** ēhtende wæs,
but the monster pursuing was
deorc dēaþscua, duguþe ond geogoþe,
dark death-shadow old noble and young warrior
seomade ond syrede; sinnihte **Ø** hēold
hovered and ambushed perpetual-night (he) held
mistige mōras; men ne cunnon,
misty moor men not know
hwyder helrūnan hwyrftum scrīþað.
whither demons motion wander
Swā fela fyrena **fēond mancynnes**,
thus many crimes enemy mankind's
atol āngengea, oft gefremede,
terrible solitary one often accomplished
herdra hȳnða; Heorot **Ø** eardode,
hard injuries Heorot (he) inhabited
sincfāge sel sweartum nihtum; . . .
richly decorated hall dark nights
nō **hē** þone gifstōl grētan mōste, (159–68)
not he the gift-seat approach must
'**The monster** was lying in wait, a dark death-shadow, he ambushed and devoured both young men and veterans; in perpetual night, he held the misty moors; nobody knows where whispering demons, such warlocks wander. Many awful sins against mankind the solitary fiend often committed, atrocious hurt. He took over Heorot, the jewel-decorated, in the black nights; but he could not come near the throne itself, the treasure seat.'

(b) Þā **se wyrm** onwōc, wrōht wæs genīwad;
then the dragon awoke strife was renewed
Ø stonc ðā æfter stāne, stearcheort onfand
(he) moved then along stone stout-hearted found
fēondes fōtlāst; hē tō forð gestōp
enemy's footprint he too forth stepped
dyrnan cræfte **dracan** hēafde nēah.
secret craft dragon's head near
Swā mæg unfæge ēaðe gedīgan
so may undoomed easily survive
wēan ond wrǣcsīð sē ðe Waldendes
woe and misery he that Lord's
hyldo gehealdeþ! **Hordweard** sōhte
favor holds treasure-guard sought
georne æfter grunde, wolde guman findan,
eagerly after ground would man find
þone þe **him** on sweofote sāre getēode; (2287–95)
him that him on sleep sorely assigned
'Then **the dragon** awoke and with it new strife. He slithered down the rock, found a footprint. Cleverly, in secret, the outlaw had stepped too close to the dragon's head. So may a man not marked by fate easily escape exile and woe by the grace of God. The treasure guardian searched the ground, wanted to find the man who had sorely harmed him in sleep.'

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Table 4. *Persistence of some major characters in NPs without* se

	Number of occurrences	Number of mentions in next 10 lines	Average persistence
the dragon	33	31	0.94
Grendel	15	22	1.47

In contrast to the high degree of persistence (topicality) of major participants introduced by NPs with *se*, the persistence of major participants is low after mentions consisting of a noun with no determiner. However, measuring the persistence of these NPs without *se* is not a completely straightforward matter. There are many occurrences throughout the text of determiner-less lexical nouns denoting major participants (some examples may be found in (13)–(15) above), but a large number (over one-third) occur within the ten lines following a coreferential NP with *se* (e.g. *fēond mancynnes* and *atol ǣngengea* in 15a; *dracan* and *Hordweard* in 15b). They do not themselves introduce topics but simply form one more link in a topic chain already initiated by the NP with *se*; and since they follow NPs with *se*, we should expect them to display a high level of persistence, as well. I therefore excluded them from this text count and measured only the persistence of major participants introduced by determiner-less NPs occurring outside the scope of an NP with *se* (i.e. not occurring within the ten lines following an NP with *se*). For the dragon, there were 33 such occurrences (as shown in table 4); in the ten lines following these occurrences, there was a total of only 31 subsequent mentions, for an average persistence of 0.94, considerably lower than the persistence of the dragon after mentions with *se* (2.68; see table 3). The difference in the number of mentions with and without *se* is highly significant ($\chi^2 = 25.50$, $p < .0001$).

There were 24 mentions of Grendel using NPs with no determiner (and occurring outside the scope of an already existing topic chain initiated by *se*), followed by 64 subsequent mentions, for an average persistence of 2.67. While this figure is lower than the one for Grendel-references with *se* (3.45; see table 3), it appears, at first glance, to suggest that mentions of Grendel without *se* are also highly topical. However, 42 of these 64 recurrences (nearly two-thirds) follow only nine mentions of Grendel. Three of these nine examples occur in the middle of the description of the battle between Beowulf and Grendel, when both characters are, of course, highly topical. While these three NPs do not occur within ten lines after a reference to Grendel containing *se*, they do nonetheless occur close by (the mention in line 725, *fēond* 'fiend', occurs thirteen lines after a mention with *se*; that in 750, *fyrena hyrde* 'shepherd of sins', comes eleven lines after a mention with *se*; the one in 816, *atol ǣglǣca* 'terrible wretch', is found fifteen lines after). Therefore, these three NPs with no determiner are best analyzed as recurrences of a topic introduced by an NP with *se* (though I have not included them in the text counts shown in table 3 since they do not occur within the stipulated limit of ten lines). They should not be considered examples of employing a determiner-less NP to introduce a highly topical referent; this (incorrect) analysis is an artifact of the

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methodological choice of using an arbitrary number (ten, in this case) for the purposes of quantifying the notion of persistence.

The other six cases of determiner-less mentions of Grendel followed by a large number of recurrences of the same referent all occur after Beowulf has killed Grendel, in a passage of direct speech (lines 957–79) in which Beowulf recounts the events, the next day, for the entire company in King Hrothgar's hall (lines 962 *fēond* 'fiend'; 969 *feorhgenīðlan* 'life-enemy'; 970 *fēond*; 973 *fēasceaft guma* 'wretched man'; 974 *lāðgetēona* 'hateful criminal'; 978 *maga māne fāh* 'guilt-stained man'). In this context, Beowulf's language reflects his own perspective, in which he himself is the topic (the participant most crucially involved in the action) and focus of attention. Accordingly, Grendel's role is de-emphasized – formally, in this passage, Grendel is mentioned frequently but generally appears either as clausal object or as subject of a verb of submission (*lie struggling*; *left his hand*; *live no longer*; etc.), while Beowulf generally appears in subject position:

(16) (a) Ic hine hrædlīce heardan clammum
I him quickly hard grasp
on wælbedde wrīþan þōhte,
on death-bed bind thought
þæt hē for mundgripe mīnum scolde
that he for hand-grip my should
licgean līfbysig (963–6)
lie life-struggling
'I planned to bind him quickly in a tight grip, tie him on his death-bed, that life might be difficult once he lay fast in my hand-grip'

(b) nō ic him þæs georne ætfealh,
not I him so readily held firmly
feorhgenīðlan; (968–9)
life-enemy
'not firmly enough did I grip him, my deadly enemy'

Despite the many mentions of Grendel in Beowulf's speech, none of these NPs occurs with *se*, because Grendel is not topical here (no mentions of Grendel take *se* in this section of the text until after the conclusion of Beowulf's speech, in line 989, which is the very last clause of that chapter; see next section). So, if we exclude these nine cases from consideration because they are not really examples of topics introduced without *se*, then (as seen in table 4) we are left with 15 occurrences of Grendel-references without *se* followed, in the subsequent ten lines, by only 22 recurring mentions, an average persistence of 1.47, much lower than the persistence following mentions with *se*. In this case, the difference in number of mentions with and without *se* is again highly significant ($\chi^2 = 13.26$, $p<.001$). In sum, the data strongly suggest that *se* is used to introduce highly topical referents, in other words, to mark NPs standing at the head of a chain of frequent coreferences in close proximity to one another.[16]

[16] I did not count determiner-less mentions of Beowulf because this character is highly topical throughout every passage in which he plays a part.

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5 Chapter boundaries

We have now seen that *se* in *Beowulf* can be used to mark the identifiability, discourse prominence or topicality of a referent. One final discourse function of *se* is to signal a chapter boundary. In this use, it occurs in noun phrases near the end of a chapter or the beginning of a new one.

It is not unusual for languages to possess elements – demonstratives or otherwise – marking the start or the end of an episode, as noted, for example, by Givón (1995: 74): 'Some grammatical devices are better described as theme switching or paragraph-initial devices. Rather than coding the re-activated topic, they signal the beginning of a new thematic paragraph.' And it has already been noted that independent (i.e. pronominal) *se* had a subject-changing function in Old English, that is, it could indicate that the subject of the current clause is different from that of the previous clause (see Mitchell 1985: 129; Traugott 1992: 171). In a similar manner, determiner *se* may be used at the level of discourse structure to signal a shift in thematic narrative unit.

Like most lengthy Old English poems, *Beowulf* is divided formally into chapters, or sections, called FITS (or FITTS). The start of each chapter is indicated by a Roman numeral and an indentation. There are 42 fitts in *Beowulf*; the very beginning of the text is not numbered (Roman numeral I comes at line 53). However, the Roman numerals go up to XLIII because there is no indication at all of fitt XXX. With a couple of exceptions, typical chapter length is sixty to ninety lines (all this information is taken from Klaeber 1950: c–ci; more details on the fitts in *Beowulf* can be found there, as well). As Klaeber (1950: ci) argues, although the boundaries between chapters do not always correspond to modern notions of discourse structure, there are nevertheless too many formal patterns found at chapter boundaries for the divisions to be merely arbitrary. For instance, several chapters end with a summarizing statement; several begin with a reporting clause introducing a speech. In this section, I will show that determiner *se* is another one of these formal indicators of chapter boundaries. Here are some examples:

(17) (a)

				Men	ne	cunnon		
				men	not	be able		
secgan	tō	sōðe,			selerædende,			
to say	in	truth			hall-counselors			
hæleð	under	heofenum,		hwā	**þǣm**	**hlæste**	onfēng.	
heroes	under	heaven		who	that	cargo	received	
I Đā	wæs	on	burgum		Bēowulf	Scyldinga,		
then	was	in	fortified places		Beow	Scyldings'		
lēof	lēodcyning		longe	þrāge				(50–4)
dear	people-king		long	time				

'Men cannot say, wise men in hall nor warriors in the field, not truly, who received **that cargo**.

Then in the strongholds, Beow the Scylding was king of all Denmark, beloved by his people for a long time.'

(b)

Wēl	bið	þǣm	þe	mōt
well	be	him	who	be allowed

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æfter dēaðdæge Drihten sēcean
after death-day Lord to seek
ond tō Fæder fæþmum freoðo wilnian!
and to Father's outstretched arms protection desire
III Swā **ðā mælceare** maga Healfdenes
so the time-care son Halfdane's
singāla sēað; (186–90)
continually seethed
'Blessed is he who after death is allowed to seek the Lord's embrace and ask his protection.
So Halfdane's son brooded continually over **the sorrow of his time**.'

(c) þā **se gōda** cōm
when the good came
lēoda dugoðe on lāst faran.
peoples' troop on track go
XLI Wæs **sīo swātswaðu** **Swēona ond Gēata**,
was the blood-track Swedes and Geats
wælrǣs weora wīde gesȳne,
bloody conflict men's widely visible
hū ðā folc mid him fǣhðe tōwehton.
how the people with them feud woke up
Gewāt him ðā se gōda mid his gædelingum, (2944–9)
departed him then the good with his kinsmen
'when **the good (king)** came down the path with his troops.
The bloody trail of Swedes and Geats, swathe of the killed, was visible everywhere, how the tribes stirred up the feud. Then the king, together with his kinsmen, withdrew.'

In (17a), the end of a chapter is marked by the NP *þǣm hlæste* 'that cargo'. This chapter dealt with the funeral of King Scyld (the cargo in line 52 refers to his body). The next chapter, fitt I, talks about his successor, Beow. In (17b), the start of fitt III is indicated by the NP *ðā mǣlceare* 'the sorrow'. This unusual strategy of employing *se* with a noun referring to an abstract concept, such as an emotion (in *Beowulf*, 22 occurrences of *se*, 5.8 percent, are found with abstract nouns), serves as a clear sign of a change in thematic paragraph. The third fitt begins with a statement summarizing the end of the previous chapter (the helplessness of the Danes before Grendel's attacks), with the Danes' emotions clearly emphasized by the use of *se*, before it moves on to a new matter, namely, the introduction of Beowulf and his preparations for helping the Danes. In (17c), both the end of chapter XL and the start of XLI contain NPs with *se*, in order to help signal the thematic shift from Hygelac (*se gōda* 'the hero' in 2944) to Ongentheow (*se gōda* in 2949). The new chapter again starts by summarizing the action of the previous one by means of an NP with *se* (*sīo swātswaðu* 'the bloody trail' left by the two warring nations).

Statistically, a noun phrase containing *se* occurs near a chapter boundary in 27 of the 42 (64.3%) possible cases in *Beowulf*. I define the notion of 'near' as falling within two clauses of the chapter boundary. Thus, the distal demonstrative determiner occurs within either the final two clauses (e.g. 17a) or the first two clauses (e.g. 17b) of a chapter

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(or both; see 17c) almost two-thirds of the time. If we take a more restrictive view and define 'near a chapter boundary' to mean within only one clause of the boundary, we still find an NP with *se* in almost half the cases (20 of 42, or 47.6 percent). The frequency with which we find *se* near chapter boundaries is even more striking when we consider that, as Klaeber noted, there are several other formal techniques for signaling chapter divisions in *Beowulf* and at least one of these – speeches – is generally incompatible with the use of *se*. It is quite common for a new fitt to begin with a speech. When this happens, the first clause of the fitt is usually a reporting clause with a speech act verb (typically *maþelode* 'said') and the main verb subject is the name of the character who is about to speak (as in 18a).

(18) (a) XXI Bēowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgþēowes: (1383)
Beowulf said son Ecgtheow's
'Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke:'

(b) IIII Him **se yldesta** andswarode, (258)
him the oldest answered
'**The chief** answered him'

In these types of sentences, we are unlikely to find *se* at all because names rarely occur with a determiner (nor do appositive NPs, such as *bearn Ecgþēowes* in (18a), usually take *se*). Four of the fitts lacking an occurrence of *se* near their opening sentence take this form (lines 456, 499, 925, 1383). If we exclude this group from consideration, then the percentage of chapter boundaries with *se* rises to 71.1 percent (27 of 38). By comparison, on the one occasion that a chapter boundary contains a speech act verb whose subject is a lexical noun rather than a proper name, then *se* does occur (see (18b)).

6 Conclusion

I have argued in this article that a complete account of the meaning and use of the distal demonstrative determiner *se* in *Beowulf* cannot be limited to only deixis and identifiability. The determiner *se* possesses other functions as well, namely, the marking of discourse prominence, high topicality (as characterized by high levels of persistence) and chapter boundaries.

Naturally, much more research remains to be done in the area of Old English demonstratives. The results of the present study should be tested not only by examining epic poems other than *Beowulf*, but also through careful study of the use of the distal demonstrative determiner in different text genres (e.g. prose). It would also be interesting to examine the use of *se* as an independent pronoun (meaning either 'that' or 'he') and compare those findings to the ones described in this article for determiner *se*; in addition, a comparison of *se* with the OE proximal demonstrative *þes* 'this' should also be undertaken. Eventually, a better understanding of Old English *se*, especially its discourse-related functions, is important not only for its own sake, but also because it could help shed light on the thorny problem of the meaning of the definite article in Modern English.

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