

Appendix 2

SOME CORRECTIONS TO ALAN BLISS'S INDICES TO THE METRE OF *BEOWULF*,¹ TOGETHER WITH HIS LAST KNOWN VIEWS ON THE METRE OF THE POEM

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I OFFERED THE following list of corrections to Rafa Pascual for the benefit of the CLASP project. He suggested that I might add this note on them for the wider audience of those interested in OE metre and in Bliss's contribution to our understanding of it.

The Examiners of my Oxford PhD thesis on the composition of Old English verse translation were Terry Hoad (internal) and Alan Bliss (external). After the viva (and an indication from them that the thesis would pass!), Bliss and I smoked a cigarette together. I expressed my admiration for *The Metre of Beowulf* (*MoB*); we agreed it would be enjoyable in future to discuss metrical problems. Some weeks later I was invited for interview for a temporary lectureship at University College, Dublin where Bliss was Professor; before that could happen I was appointed to a longer-term position at New College and so withdrew. I wrote to him, expressing my regret that we would not after all be able to talk as we had wished. With the letter I included a short list of errors I had come across in my work with *MoB*. A little while later, I received a reply dated August 1, 1985.

I had pointed out to him two slight, but not entirely trivial, problems:

1. His "Appendix C, The Scansion of *Beowulf*: Statistical Information Table I" (p. 122) gives the numbers of a-verses of Types 1A1 and 1A*1 with single alliteration as 12 and 25, respectively. As these departures from their usual double alliteration had been of interest to me in the thesis in my study of metrical and alliterative licences in OE poetic translation, I had checked all of the instances of these types in *MoB*'s closing "Index to the Scansion of *Beowulf*" (35–57) against the text. The correct numbers were 13 and 24, respectively! I included the lists.² He replied: "After so long a lapse of time I can only guess at the reasons for any lapses that turn up in the book. I note that the total number of instances of Type 1A1 and Type 1A*1 taken together is right, so it looks as if there is a single case of wrong classification. I suspect that at some stage I intended to take *nean* in 1174a as disyllabic, as I did in 839b, where the two words are transposed; then later I changed my mind." In 839b, the earlier

¹ First ed. Oxford, 1958; rev. ed. 1962, reprinted with corrections 1967.

² Type 1A1a: 682, 870, 1174, 1179, 1250, 1375, 1491, 1658, 1857, 1975, 2269, 3078; Type 1A1b: 665; Type 1A*1a: 72, 98, 603, 621, 624, 680, 777, 805, 871, 996, 1055, 1090, 1396, 1611, 1674, 1908, 2094, 2275, 2489, 2602, 2850, 2891, 2941, 2993.

uncontracted form is required by the metre, but not so in 1174a. This raises the question of whether uncontracted forms should be read only where metrically necessary, or always when metrically possible. Metrists tend to be conservative on the point; but a poet concerned with the distant past might have chosen, where his poetic language offered variants, always to use the older linguistic forms (in so far as he knew those). Bliss had, perhaps, recognized this problem.

2. In 928b and 1314a, he had noted secondary stress on the second element of *alwealda* (3E2, d2c), but not so in 316b or 955b (1D1, 3E1)! He responded: "As for *alwealda*, I have to plead guilty to inconsistency. My excuse is that it is genuinely a difficult word: I'm not surprised that I couldn't make up my mind. Since the meanings of the two elements must have been present in the whole it should have secondary stress; but since the form of the first element has been reduced and obscured it should not. The same problem arises in a more acute form with *ælmihitig*." He did not comment explicitly on the scansion he thought to be correct.

I would have liked to have pursued this and other questions further with him, but, alas, it was not to be, for he died on November 24 that same year. I should have replied more quickly, but I was in the throes of my first major teaching appointment and did not know that he was ill.

His letter of August 1 went on to give an amalgamated list of the errors that he had already spotted and the few which I had just sent to him. Only one was common to both. He did not comment on any of these apart from line 838 where he expressed surprise: "I can't imagine what happened to line 838, where both the notations bear no resemblance at all to the proper scansions."³ The list was as follows:

126b	for	d2a	read	d3a
301a	for	a1a	read	a1e
560b	for	d3b	read	d1b
838a	for	2A3b	read	d2b
838b	for	3E1	read	2A3b
1077a	for	2E2a	read	2E1a
1256a	for	2A3a	read	2A3b
1484a	for	2B1e	read	3B*1e
1787b	for	2A1	read	2A1
1823b	for	2C2c	read	2A1a
1824b	for	2A1a	read	2C2c

³ No line in the poem scans as 2A3b, 3E1. It is curious that the two lines in his Index with this scansion (838, 2979) are both erroneous.

1903a	for	2A1	read	2A1
2423b	for	3E1b	read	3B1b
2509a	for	1A1a	read	1A2a
2693a	for	2A1a	read	2A1
2716b	for	1D1	read	1D1
2907b	for	1D1	read	1D1
2909b	for	2A1	read	2A1

In addition, to the “Index to the Scansion of the Hypermetric Verses in Old English” (pp. 162–68), he changed the scansion of *The Metres of Boethius* 7.23b from 1A1c(2E1a) to 1A1a(2E1a) and added the omitted line 25.46, for which he offered the scansions 25.46a 2A1a(1A1a), and 25.46b a1b(2A1a).⁴

The supervisor of my thesis, who had recommended Alan Bliss as the external examiner, was Eric Stanley. Over the years we had many discussions about Old English studies; none, so far as I now recall, about *MoB* particularly, although I knew that he had a strong respect for it and its author. Eric died two years ago, and a section of his library came up for sale in January this year, 2020, at Mallams. I bought two items containing some 170 volumes of OE and ME studies, including quite numerous works on OE metre, amongst which were both the first and the revised edition of *MoB*. Eric reviewed the first edition, mainly very positively, for *EPS* 8 (1963), pp. 47–53. Quite a number of the 170 volumes were review copies and show that Eric did not much annotate those books he reviewed. Both copies of *MoB* are clean, except for the following pencilled corrections to the “Index to the Scansion of *Beowulf*,” which I give in the same form as above:⁵

109b	for	2B1a	read	2B1d
441b	for	2C2a	read	2C2d
687b	for	2C1a	read	2C1c
968b	for	3B*1a	read	3B*1d
996b	for	2C2	read	2C2d
1249b	for	d2c	read	d2d
1329a	for	2A1a	read	2A2
1560b	for	2C1a	read	2C1d
2311a	for	d3b	read	d3c
2620a	for	3B*1d	read	3B*1a (with note: ‘a or em[end] b’)

⁴ The list includes three errors—to 1077a, 1256a, 1484a—which are noted in the Errata on p. vii of the reprinted edition of 1967, but the change made there to 1069a 1D1 > 1D3 was not included in this list.

⁵ Eric noted, as Bliss had, the incorrect order of 1823b and 1824b.

In the case of 2620a, Eric's note reflects the fact that Klaeber 3 reads "He [ð̥a] frætwe geheold" with an editorial insertion (not accepted by Klaeber 4). The problem of 1329a is more interesting. Bliss allowed secondary stress in the compound in the phrase "iren ærgod" in 989a and 2586a, but not in "æþeling ærgod" in 130a, 1329a and 2342a (though Eric noted only 1329a). This could be another inconsistency, as Eric appears to have taken it to be, or—and I think this likelier—Bliss was influenced in this by Klaeber's Glossary ("æ̥r-gōd̥, adj., GOOD *from old times, very good*; (īren) æ̥rgōd, 989, 2586; (applied to: æþeling) æ̥rgōd, 130, 1329, 2342") and interpreted the first element of the compound in the second phrase as an intensifying prefix, rather than a fully semantic element.

In the years since 1985, I have noted only three further corrections:

1143a	for	a1c	read	d1c
1689a	for	2A1	read	1A1
2979a	for	2A3b	read	2A3a

Most of these errors by Bliss are wholly trivial; he had a hand-written card index to the verses of the poem and in its production, or in turning it into the Index to the Scansion, <a> seems occasionally to have been misread as <d>, or vice-versa (so 109b, 441b, 968b, 1143a, 1560b, 2620a).⁶ Italics are occasionally an issue too (1787b, 1903a, 2716b, 2907b, 2909b), but are more probably slips by the printer. This leaves the question of his inconsistency over *alwealda*. Is there any evidence to suggest which scansion he would finally have preferred? Earlier in the letter, he remarks of *MoB* that "there are many things I should like to change: I can't now believe, for instance, that there is no secondary stress in such forms as *East-Dene* and the like." On the surface of it, this is a curious comment, because in *MoB* he scans all the instances of *East-*, *Norð-*, *West-*, and *Suð-Dene* with secondary stress! He also stresses *Gar-* and *Hring-Dene* in the same way. Only *Beorht-Dene*, in his scansion, lacks secondary stress (427a, 609a), presumably because of the perceived semantic opaqueness of the first element.⁷ He can only be alluding to the one footnote in the book on these names in "Chapter Three: Stress and Quantity." Tertiary stress, he says there, is found in proper names in which "the individual elements have no independent existence," to which he adds the following note:

⁶ He refers to the index and to the help of many friends and pupils in its production in his Preface to *MoB*, vi.

⁷ The adjective *beorht* may, however, be used of people to mean "excellent," "magnificent" (see DOE *beorht*, E 4), and it presumably means something of that sort in this name. Secondary stress on the second element of this compound would also be metrically unproblematic in his system (427a, 609a).

Compounds like *Suð-Dene* must be considered doubtful, since it is not agreed whether the prefix is intended to distinguish a particular group of Danes or is merely conventional and ornamental.⁸

It seems, then, that one matter on which he was, in his theory, no longer doubtful was that such “prefixes” in these tribal names were not conventional or ornamental, although he had, in practice, recognized that in his scansions.⁹ If this is correct, then the first part of his argument over *alwealda*—“since the meanings of the two elements must have been present in the whole it should have secondary stress”—would presumably have had more force for him than the second. Given also his assigning of secondary stress in 92a *ælmih̄tig* and 1500a *ælwih̄t*, it seems very probable that he would have recognized the extra stress also in *alwealda* in 316b and 955b.

What, however, the “many things” were that he would have liked to change in *MoB*, we can now only speculate.¹⁰

8 §32 (4), and §32 (4)n1.

9 This new lack of doubt presumably did not extend to the second element of the personal name *Healfdene*. Types 1D(*)2–6 are forbidden in the b-verse in Bliss’s system, but verses such as “maga Healfdenes” occur with some frequency there (189, 1020, 1040, 1474, 1652, 2011, 2143) (Klaeber 4). He first scanned the tribal name, *Healfdene*, in 1069a also with tertiary stress, but changed this to secondary stress in the revised edition.

10 I thank Peter Lucas for offering valuable suggestions on a draft version of this appendix.

