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"Beowulf": Interpretation and Supplementation

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Beowulf: Interpretation and Supplementation

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the various ways in which *Beowulf* has been interpreted across time, explaining how factors, called paratexts, have played a large part in shaping these interpretations and how, especially in reading the *Beowulf* manuscript, we inherit the sum of these influences. In order to demonstrate this, I present a variety of arguments and perspectives on the text that have been developed by scholars over the years based on different types of paratexts (physical, intangible, and translational) in the absence of a known author. At each stage of *Beowulf*'s life, there have been opportunities for individuals with authority over the text to change the way it was presented to the audience, even today where new media adaptations are responsible for representing *Beowulf* to a modern audience. My investigation concluded that despite the immense amount of research having been previously conducted in an effort to develop a deeper understanding of the text, ultimately, there will always be room for new interpretations.

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Introduction

Students of literature spend a good portion of their academic studies analyzing texts from various genres, historical times, and authors. Typically, this process begins with learning more about the author and their inspiration before reading the text and forming our own interpretation. Academics do this because the story's creator is the foremost authority on the content of the text—it's the closest thing we can get to a "correct" reading of a text. However, in the absence of definitive evidence derived from the author, interpretation becomes less unanimous, with each reader contextualizing the text through their own personal experiences, which varies widely from person to person. This means that the meaning or significance of a text (what is usually supplied by information from/about the author) will also vary. Thus, each reader develops a unique understanding of the importance of the text (what moral lesson it conveys, what does it say about the work's moment in history, what purpose it serves, etc.). Often contradictory, the variety of interpretations this produces cannot all be true. So how do we determine which belief is supported by the text when there is a void of authorial information?

Afterall, our perception of an author has changed over the centuries—people even used to read without caring who the author was in the first place. "There was a time when those texts which we now call 'literary' (stories, folk tales, epics, and tragedies) were accepted, circulated, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author. Their anonymity was ignored because their real or supposed age was a sufficient guarantee of their authenticity" (Foucault 8). This is the authorship era from which *Beowulf* derives. Therefore, if the original

readers of *Beowulf* were unconcerned with authorship, why do we give it so much authority to define how we read the text? There is a certain level of prestige we attach to an author's name, usually this lends authority to an author's words (to be an author is to have authority over what they wrote). However, in some cases, knowing the person who wrote a work can undercut the perceived validity of a work. As Barthes' describes in "The Death of the Author,"

> The author still rules in manuals of literary history, in biographies of writers, in magazine interviews, and even in the awareness of literary men, anxious to unite, by their private journals, their person and their work; the image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions; criticism still consists, most of the time, in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of the man Baudelaire, Van Gogh's work his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice: the explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always finally the voice of one and the same person, the author, which delivered his "confidence." (Barthes 2)

We see the work as inseparable from or an extension of the person to whom it owes its creation. But even today, despite that conception, there are many contributors to a written text beyond the author listed on the cover. In medieval times, manuscript-making was a collective effort, as well. As such, it is a fallacy to believe that knowing only about the author will allow a reader to be able to fully understand all aspects of a text. The more people who are involved, the more convoluted the narrative voice becomes so that rather than being the author's voice alone, the cacophony coalesces into a coherent story. Barthes continues,

> It will always be impossible to know [whose voice is speaking, the author, character, etc.], for the good reason that all writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and that literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes. (Barthes 2)

The problem with that notion of an author's voice being the sole voice in a text, specifically when dealing with works like *Beowulf*, is that oftentimes there was not one single person contributing to reach the end product. Instead, a series of choices made by various people over time all contributed to the work we know today as *Beowulf*. It is these choices, as well as a variety of external factors, that this thesis will focus on. *Beowulf* is not a stagnant piece of literature; it is an ever-evolving work with more people contributing to and influencing its consumption in the modern world every day.

When studying a text where the authorship is indeterminate, the question becomes what factors *should* influence our perception of the text—in other words, what variables should be given more authority to shape interpretation where the authorial perspective cannot be defined. The umbrella term that defines these factors in manuscript studies is paratexts. Paratexts are supplementary materials that are adjacent to the text that have the potential to affect the way in which a reader understands the content of the story.

In saying that, the use of the term supplementary materials here may mislead one to believe that paratexts are a reading guide or scholarly analysis the reader should consume to further their understanding of the text; however, that is not the case. Traditional paratexts are

things like the version, cover, font choice, foreword, afterword, and author's notes (included in the book or an external recorded comment on the text)—all of which could inform a reader's perception of the book. For example, a novel that is written entirely in Comic Sans will give the novel a completely different feel than if it was written in a more traditional font like Times New Roman. While they are both technically humanist fonts, Comic Sans is meant to be goofier and Times New Roman is a humanist serif designed to make words easier to read as a more official-use type of font. If a person writes a joke book in comic sans no one would bat an eye, but if they wrote a 200+ page horror novel in comic sans, it would create some cognitive dissonance between the mood created by the font and the actual words on the page (upon reflection, the dissonance created could add to the suspense, so use this tool with discretion). Formatting and design choices, like the font example, can have input from the author, editor, or publisher—anyone who has direct influence over the presentation of the text to the reader can contribute to its paratexts. The choices authors and editors make when compiling a text all affect how readers receive it. Therefore, paratexts can serve as a substitute for the explicit knowledge of authorial intent since they are, in essence, another outlet for the contributors to exert influence and exercise their voices implicitly.

However, while physical paratexts are the most commonly acknowledged, there are also intangible paratextual considerations—invisible information relevant to the text that will influence the reading of it. While this definition of paratexts (including intangibles such as date of writing, cultural or religious influences, allusions, etc.) is not very common, it is especially important in codicology (manuscript studies). For instance, a person can tell a lot about a medieval manuscript based on its construction, the way quires are folded will identify it as insular or continental European text and provide an approximate date for when it was made,

while the script can denote specific regions in Europe where the text most probably originated from.

What these facts do not tell us are the ways in which the author intended for the audience to perceive their text. This is one area where the intangible paratexts can supplement the determinations of intended meaning through the author's own unintended influences. For example, Jane Austen did not write about war in her novels, opting instead to write about domestic affairs. However, we know that she wrote these novels during times of war because we have the dates they were written. While war is not the focus of her works, if the reader keeps that fact in mind while reading the something like *Sense and Sensibility*, the influence of wartime society becomes evident throughout the book and provides a new perspective with which to see the events and interactions between the characters. The reader understands the influence war has had on Colonel Brandon, who came back home to find the woman he loved had a child in his absence and was dying—which makes him all the more concerned about Marianne when she falls ill later. There are military men in all of Austen's novels—in *Pride and Prejudice* the militia men and Mr. Wickham among them are treated as a fact of life and in *Northanger Abbey*, General Tilney makes his wealth and earns the abbey because of his military accomplishments. Even though she never writes about the war itself, Austen's novels demonstrate the effects of war on domestic life; a reading which is hard to uncover without the knowledge that Austen lived in the same wartime society she depicts. Therefore, without that direct knowledge provided by the author, it is possible to utilize alternatives (to that direct knowledge) in the form of paratexts authoritatively to enable the reader to uncover a new reading of a text or even glean its purpose.

I chose this research path for a number of reasons. I've always preferred to read the text itself first so that, unencumbered by thoughts of others, I might propose a theory based upon my own observations that had never been considered before (rare, but certainly more plausible than in the instance where I am told what to think). Only after do I begin research and revisit the text once that initial impression has been established. This is the exact methodology I used to approach *Beowulf*. I did not know anything about the text before a year and a half ago, which is part of the reason why I chose it.

I was able to approach the text without any preconceived notions and minimal external influences. When I finished reading the text for the first time, I had the distinct sense I had just finished reading a fairytale, something I would find in Greek or Roman mythology, but another part of my mind believed there to be some sort of historical merit to what seemed to be documented within the poem. On account of all this, I was curious to uncover the truth, which was when I began my research. After sifting through countless scholarly essays addressing various aspects of *Beowulf* in great detail, I realized that without a definitive answer from the original author, it was all up to each individual's interpretation. From there, I asked myself, without the author, what else can guide the reader's interpretations of the text? That question arrived right at the same time I began my Medieval Manuscripts course and learned about paratexts, and with that, this thesis was born.

While I had the opportunity to read first and ask questions later, since this is an independent project, studying texts academically looks a little different under normal circumstances. The very first thing instructors do when starting a major text is provide context for the work, whether a lot or a little will vary, but it will usually be information on the author or the date it was written. Other times, professors will spend multiple class days dissecting and

defining social movements that occurred during the time of writing the text or presenting two opposing opinions on the work to prime the students' minds to look for such themes while reading. In all fairness, this method probably helps students who are not strong comprehensive readers practice the skill, but I wonder what would come of a literature course that withheld the teaching of these paratexts until after they finished reading and discussing the text? Would they find their own way like I did?

Creative works may be left to interpretation, but this author is explicitly telling the reader that the purpose of this thesis is to exhibit the variety of interpretations that exist for a text that has seemingly been looked at from every conceivable angle. Interpretation is something that can be guided or shaped based on the reader's knowledge, and, while authors may have had their intended purpose while writing a text, that does not mean there is nothing else to uncover, since authors have their own unconscious influences contributing to the content they write. Therefore, while the conscious authorial perspective is oftentimes seen as the "correct" interpretation, it is not the be-all-end-all determinate of what the text says.

I provide all of this information on paratexts as a means to contextualize the first two chapters of this thesis and simultaneously introduce its relevancy to the study of *Beowulf*. While *Beowulf* has been rigorously studied, with a well-established body of scholarly writings spanning centuries, a fresh perspective on certain pieces of exhausted evidence can be gained through careful analysis of three main obstacles facing the interpretation of readers: tangible paratexts in (creating *Beowulf*) in Chapter 1, intangible paratexts (influences on its content) in Chapter 2, and translation in Chapter 3. Each chapter adds another layer to the complexity of interpreting the original text due to the number of influences that contribute to the broader categories of considerations described within the chapters. Chapter 1 lays the foundation with the physical,

observable codicological evidence and introduces some of the biggest points of intrigue in scholarly research. Chapter 2 covers the influences with a less evident (but still present) effect on the text, discussing potential authoritative figures and groups who could haves exerted authority over the text to serve one purpose or another. Finally, Chapter 3 will explain barriers to interpretation with works in translation, like *Beowulf*, where a translator has the authority to dictate how a new audience receives and perceives the text—specifically looking at examples of translators with differing goals in mind as to how they wished to represent the text. Each chapter will review various arguments scholars have constructed over the years to demonstrate the variety and nuances of interpretations on the text and the way in which paratextual factors have led the scholars to these conceptions.

Despite the breadth of the scholarship (or perhaps because of it), there are only a few ways of thinking about the text that are so deeply entrenched in the study of *Beowulf* that it restricts the formulation of new schools of thought all together. Ordinarily, scholars explore these issues separately, hoping to prove with their evidence one theory or another, but evaluating them in tandem demonstrates how one piece of evidence alone could not possibly explain the intricate mysteries of the text—there is simply too much unknown and too many possibilities. With this thesis, I hope to demonstrate some of those perspectives by providing contradictory cases for interpretations of *Beowulf*, showing what is still possible with this text and how much is yet to be uncovered through the overall lack of consensus amongst the scholars and the text's various metamorphoses through time.

CHAPTER 1: Tangible Paratexts for Influencing Perception

Introduction

By understanding more about the codex *Beowulf* resides in (the Nowell Codex) as an artifact, we can derive certain information regarding *Beowulf*'s journey as a physical text as well—information which can influence the way in which we think about the texts as both readers and scholars. Even amongst manuscripts, the Nowell Codex has had an intricate codicological history full of quirks—what are effectively time capsules—with encoded knowledge detailing how audiences through the ages perceived the work, the degree to which it was valued, and what influences have shaped the text into what we reference today as *Beowulf*.

The first mention of what would later become the Nowell Codex appears in the Lichfield Cathedral in the eleventh century. The Lichfield Cathedral was one of the few places that still housed non-canon religious texts, like *Judith* and *St. Christopher*. Since *Judith and St. Christopher* were in the Nowell Codex along with the secular *Beowulf*, *Marvels of the East*, and the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, the texts were inadvertently preserved through the reformations in 1563 that otherwise would have destroyed them ("The reformed Nowell Codex and the *Beowulf* manuscript" 95). Eventually, the codex ended up at the Cottonian Library, luckily surviving the fire in 1731 relatively unscathed for a fire-damaged manuscript. Then, in 1753, the manuscript joined the collections of the British Museum where it remains preserved today.

As for the ownership of the poem, it is listed as having been owned by Laurence Nowell (hence the name—although, he may have just been a reader and not an actual owner), Sir Robert

Cotton, his son Sir Thomas Cotton, and further, his son Sir John Cotton before being bequeathed to the British nation in 1753 for 'Publick Use and Advantage' and comprising one piece of the collection that would become the British Museum (later transferred to the British Library in 1973), according to the British Library. Otherwise, not much is known about its history or the readers, which leaves both scholars and readers to speculate on how the manuscript came to be in the form it is in today and who the people are that have written in its margins.

One of the few things we do know is that at some point before the 1731 fire, the Nowell Codex was rebound with the Southwick Codex, which houses the texts Augustine of Hippo's *Soliloquia*, the *Gospel of Nicodemus, Debate of Saturn and Solomon* (prose version), and a homily on *St. Quintin*. Though the exact date of their combination is unknown, it is likely Sir Robert Cotton was responsible for it—having been known to rebind the books in his possession upon procurement in addition to implementing his own form of 'editing' the manuscripts (shifting texts, combining codices, etc.). Across both codices, the language for the most part is Old English and of all the texts listed above about half are imperfect, meaning the contents are missing pages.

As an artifact, the Nowell and Southwick Codices have had a long and unique life. Having survived many different iterations and forms, the history of these combined composites is complex, to say the least. Truly, this manuscript is one of a kind, not just in terms of the texts it contains (having the only surviving *Beowulf* manuscript), but also because of the history and phoenix-esque perpetual rebirth of the manuscript both physically and textually across time.

Each iteration of the manuscript has left its mark, supplying clues for scholars who hope to more clearly understand the manuscript, how it was used, and various lost pieces of history it holds. The *Beowulf* text was framed by the Nowell Codex first, then the Southwick Codex was

added to it, making a doubly composite manuscript. The fact that all of these standalone stories were grouped together in one manuscript indicates that there was intention behind their curation (this idea is explored more in Chapter 2), and, because there were so many changes made iteratively (and not all at once), scholars can effectively track potentially authoritative changes made to the text (and codices) over time. This evidence left behind from the codex's history can fundamentally alter the way in which one perceives the contents of *Beowulf*. To explore its history as an artifact or context is to explore *Beowulf*. Their histories are bound together, just as they are physically, and can serve as a point of comparison for the differences between certain intertwined texts, like *Beowulf* and *Judith*.

In this chapter, I will present the various ways in which paratextual evidence has influenced scholarly debates on *Beowulf*. The discourse I will focus on includes the poem's origin and history, the physical manuscript, and scribal influences. While there are numerous paratextual elements to consider for the only surviving *Beowulf* manuscript, for the sake of brevity, I have chosen the most fundamental considerations that have the potential to evoke an entirely different perspective on the text when regarded in a different light. The discussion of paratexts also provides foundational knowledge about the manuscript to consider when reading the subsequent chapters in this thesis on cultural paratexts and translation.

The Poem's Origin and History

Perhaps the most influential paratext also happens to be the most contentious topic within *Beowulf* scholarship: the true date the poem was written. The date of the poem's origin is extremely important to consider because it has the ability to completely change the reader's interpretation or derivative meaning of the text depending on the period in which it was

determined to have been written. Having a date is foundational to understanding authorial intent—the way in which the author intended the original audience to receive their work—so scholars perpetually come back to this question, searching for this authoritative paratext, to guide their understanding and consequential interpretations of the text. In the absence of a definitive author, the best determinant to pilot perspective is the date. I say this to explain why scholars assign such significance to the date of the poem—because they hope it can lead to a clearer picture of an author and thus, a deeper understanding of the text.

To this end, scholars have determined that *Beowulf* must have originated in one of two ways. Either the scribes who created the manuscript in the eleventh century were also the inventors of Beowulf's story, or *Beowulf* came about as the product of a much more ancient oral tradition depicting events from the sixth century. If the poem originates from a period closer to when the events portrayed in the poem take place, it can presumably present the poem to the modern reader as an accurate reflection of the time period—providing valuable insight into that piece of history. However, if the poem is a fiction created by early eleventh century scribes, the presentation of the pagan cultures becomes warped by the years of secondhand accounts and it can be assumed that the original author did not witness the period in which they were writing about, further eroding *Beowulf*'s authority as a historical text (*The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment* 201).

Without a consensus on the date, it becomes more difficult for readers to discern the degree of historical credence the text truly possesses, which can cause them to develop inaccurate assumptions. While we know the Nowell Codex was written in the eleventh century, scholars are split into two opposing groups based on the different speculated origins for the individual poem, one spearheaded by Kevin Kiernan and the other by Leonard Neidorf.

Kiernan's camp believes that the Nowell Codex contains the original draft of *Beowulf*, making the two scribes who wrote the poem the original authors of the story—or, at least, they lived during the same time as the true author in order to draft their words. Based on the evidence of revision in the manuscript, he concluded that the surviving version of this poem was the original manuscript, seeing as the scribes did extensive editing and rewriting, as would be found in a manuscript draft. Therefore, he claims that the two scribes (and/or the author) used their knowledge of Old English to write a story inspired by sixth century Scandinavia in order to achieve a cultural goal—one probably related to renewed interest in outsider's stories during Cnut's reign (this will be further addressed in Chapter 2 under Cultural Reception).

On the other side of the argument, Neidorf claims that the story of *Beowulf* is far older than the eleventh century—most likely being written in the eighth century, if not earlier. While the manuscript does date from around the eleventh century, he believes the story of *Beowulf* to be much older—potentially even an orally told pagan history before ever being copied down onto parchment (Harris 17). The very same errors and careful editorial scrutiny that Kiernan claimed to be evidence of drafting Neidorf argues as proof of ignorance, copying an exemplar in an unfamiliar language. Also, the poetic conventions and syntax indicate that the original story was written earlier, perhaps even farther back than eighth century. The specific pieces of evidence and their contradicting interpretations for each argument will be discussed in more detail in the following sections. Readers will notice that the question of date has such weight when studying *Beowulf* that every piece and type of paratextual evidence from Chapters 1 and 2 feeds back into the argument over when the text was composed.

The Physical Manuscript

As mentioned in the introduction, physical paratexts are typically forms of supplementary information that comes with the text but excludes its content. When studying a medieval manuscript, the hand-made nature of every manuscript lends itself to having extra variables to consider which have the potential to provide information on the text which can influence interpretation, such as discovering the location it was composited based upon the script or hand used by the scribes. Additionally, time leaves its own mark on the manuscript, introducing new physical factors implying how and why the codex has changed over time, suggesting also how interpretation has changed with time. As the foremost expert on the manuscript of *Beowulf*, I will let Kiernan's words from *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* convey the more technical elements where summary would be insufficient.

Over the course of its existence, the codex's texts have survived numerous physical changes to the composition of the manuscript. These changes, despite being harmful to the state of the manuscript, can also serve as paratexts so more information can be uncovered about the history of the codex that otherwise may not have been. One example of this comes from the fire damage sustained during the Cottonian repository fire in 1753. Due to the pattern of the burns and the resulting hole in the end leaf of *Beowulf*, Kiernan concluded that the leaf, prior to the fire, was used as a sort of temporary cover for *Judith*, with the burn marks possessing matching patterns, despite the two leaves currently being separated by the rest of *Judith*'s text. Additionally, the fire damage is significantly worse on the last leaf of *Beowulf* than *Judith*, even though the outside leaves (in this case *Judith*'s end leaf) should have sustained the most damage. The excess wear and tear to the *Beowulf* end leaf and evidence of the leaf being torn out and resewn into the manuscript also support the conclusion that *Beowulf*'s leaves were at one point

used as a makeshift cover for *Judith* prior to and during the Cottonian fire (*Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* 152).

The discovery is important for two reasons. First, this indicates that *Beowulf* was considered less important than preserving the *Judith* fragment—most likely due to *Judith* being a known religious text (despite its turbulent history of canonization) and *Beowulf* being a relatively unknown Old English poem, which made it more difficult for anyone in close proximity to Robert Cotton's time to fully understand the text and appreciate its value. Second, the order of the Nowell Codex's texts has shifted over time. This means that despite the Nowell Codex being a composite manuscript, it is unlikely to have been copied from an exemplar, since the order would have been previously determined, further suggesting that *Beowulf* and the other texts in the codex existed in another, stand-alone form (151).

The inconsistency in ruling across the codex can also be interpreted to support this no-exemplar theory. Despite the fact that *Beowulf* and *Judith* were written by the same scribe (one of the two who worked on *Beowulf* copied the *Judith* fragment) and even have, on average, the same number of lines (20 lines), the space between the lines differs for the two texts. These intralinear margins are ordinarily consistent if knowingly written for the same codex, but *Beowulf* averages 17.5 cm and *Judith* ranges from 16–16.5 cm. The difference is a noticeable one and ruins the uniform visual aesthetic upon the shift—not something that would normally occur within a singular manuscript unless it was compiled from individual works (151-152). Based on this evidence, Kiernan concludes that "Almost certainly, *Judith* once was part of another codex entirely, and certainly it did not always follow *Beowulf*" and further speculates on its incorporation into the codex, "There is paleographical and codicological evidence that has not

been brought forth that the *Judith* fragment, as a fragment, was indeed a late addition to the codex" (150; 151).

Unfortunately for all scholars involved, the fact that it is improbable that the codex was copied from an exemplar does not in reality contribute definitive evidence for either argument on its date. All of the other texts in the codex have copies in other codices or independently with the exception of *Beowulf*. However, what this does tell scholars is that the texts were compiled with intention—though uncovering that purpose is another challenge.

To demonstrate this idea of intentional manuscript curation, I must also explain the idea of a parvus librus ('little library'). In medieval times, it was very expensive to buy a book, but books were the best way for the people to get some form of education. The educational benefits were especially important for the families that would feel their expense the most heavily—private libraries being an impossible expense and public ones would not pop up until much later. So, the parvus librus was one book that would contain numerous different texts that would all contribute to learning or have a curated theme, effectively, one book serving as the family library. The family could make certain requests for content, but the parvus librus was a form of composite that varied, each one complied for a specific purpose, whether it be to teach courtship behaviors, good morals, or religious principles. The only way to uncover the purpose of the composition was to consider the content of all the texts included in tandem—a technique which some have adopted for use on *Beowulf* (more on this in Chapter 2). Certainly, this type of intentional curation would have played a role in the composition of the Nowell codex when Robert Cotton rebound it with the Southwick Codex, and before that the clerics had to keep their library contents sorted somehow, so there must have been an intentional reason behind the union of the texts. The point is, knowing that the Nowell Codex, upon its creation, was a new

composite begs the question of why it was formed to begin with. How did the compositors see *Beowulf* as fitting in with the other texts? Whatever common themes are found among the texts would also reveal how those people centuries ago interpreted *Beowulf*, which, having widely different life experience, will probably be unique from any derivative perspective of the modern day.

In addition to the confusion in regard to curation of the codex, the foliation fiascos Kiernan describes in the section "History and Construction of the Codex" indicates further folio shuffling throughout the codex's long life. To begin, Kiernan explains,

> The present 'official foliation of Cotton Vitellius A. XV. is inaccurate. Even in June 1884, when it was introduced, this foliation was not entirely accurate, for it failed to renumber in proper sequence the folios in two transposed quires from *Alexander's Letter*, in the Nowell Codex. Today, in addition to this error, the 1884 foliation is inaccurate throughout the codex, for it counts in the foliation of the two Old English codices three prefixed leaves, the first of which was removed from the codex in 1913. (*Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* 71-72)

Overall, the inconsistency in foliating the Nowell Codex rendered more modern foliations unreliable, and consequently, unauthoritative. This led Kiernan to develop his own modified foliation based upon the oldest available one the codex had to offer, which he uses throughout his book and has since been used by other scholars. He outlines his rationale,

> This older foliation, which will be referred to throughout as the MS foliation, can still be clearly seen in the MS and in the FSS in the vicinity of the upper right corners, recto, of each leaf. When it was introduced, late in the 18th century, several leaves were out of

> place, but these errors are easily enough corrected without abandoning this basically true, and historically informative, foliation. For instance, the foliation 1-90 of the Southwick Codex is perfectly in order. The 1884 foliation, by counting the three prefixed leaves, throws this count off by three, yet in reality, because one of the prefixed leaves [a 'mutilated page from a 14th-century Latin *Psalterium*' turned sideways in the codex used as an end leaf; it was later taken out and returned to the original *Psalterium* manuscript it was taken from in the first place] is now gone, the difference is two. (72)

This is the most concise account as to the source of the confusion when foliating the codex. Over time, pieces have been moved, or removed entirely, so how could anyone numbering the leaves be able to make a decisive choice of how to order things with such a convoluted history? Kiernan believes the only option is to rely on the eldest foliation, equating the eldest to possessing the most authority. Authority, in this case as well as in every other, is assigned to information in close proximity to the text at its inception. By tracing backwards through the history of foliations, Kiernan appointed the oldest surviving form for priority use over every following iteration.

Age is, of course, assumed to be the most reliable means of ascribing authority because the older the information with respect to the text, the more likely it is to be relevant or able to supplant a lack of authorial intelligence. With respect to foliation, to take a somewhat modern example, the first *Star Wars* movies were 4-6 then 1-3 were created as a prequel years later. Does a new viewer watch #3 or #1 first if they've never seen it before? The order a person watches the films will alter their impression of the story, just as it would with a text, and nine times out of ten we hear *Star Wars* fans tell people to start with #3 instead of #1. Why? Not only

because it was made first (more "authoritative"), but also because there is a perception that if a person were to be introduced to the franchise differently than the fan was, they would be less likely to develop the same favorable opinion—and they are right. Order will affect interpretation even if each work is self-contained, which is why the foliation of the codex is so important for *Beowulf* perceptions.

In total, Kiernan references six different foliations through the years (86). However, despite the number of foliations for the codex, none of the older, more authoritative ones can even be considered anymore, "The reason the two earliest foliations of the Nowell Codex have not been recognized is that the fire destroyed all physical evidence of them in the MS" (87). Therefore, with no early, more authoritative foliations, the paleographers were forced to make do with the remaining foliations. Since paleographers must rely on the foliations available, it resulted in scholars making an effort to reconcile the old with the new (maintain authority while "correcting" the order). In other words, scholars tried to reconcile the foliations through hybridizing them.

There are two main reasons why determining the order is so critical to the reading experience. If each story in the codex is like a chapter to a modern collection of short stories, the editors, publisher, and authors deliberately chose that order to put the works in so that the reader would have a certain experience, specifically the stories at the beginning and end will have the most impression on the reader. The beginning is the hook and the end is what the reader is left to ponder and *Beowulf*, in certain foliations (*Judith* was not always at the end, after all), fulfills this role of the concluding chapter. The question becomes why did the curators believe *Beowulf* needed to play this part? What was the intent behind this choice? The second reason foliation is important is because misplaced folios can change the way we interpret the story if it's out of

place in or missing entirely from the text. The most famous example of this is the book (intentionally) without page numbers, the mystery of *Cain's Jawbone*. In order to uncover the murder mystery plot, the reader must first figure out how to put the pages in order, a monumental task considering how little the 100 pages seem to relate to one another. In 92 years, only four people have successfully uncovered the correct order, and consequently, the correct order of events in the plot—reading the pages out of order gives the reader glimpses into the story, but without the order it is almost impossible to figure out the murderer(s). While this may be the extreme case of mis-foliation, it exemplifies how even the order of the pages can influence the way readers perceive the contents of the text. Therefore, we must ask why these folios were moved and, for the sake of all future readers, should we move them back?

Later on in the same chapter of *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, Kiernan picks apart such a comparison by Norman Davis of the old foliation to the new,

> These 'correspondences,' as Davis calls then, would be more tolerable, or at least more memorable, if the new numbers merely advanced the MS foliation numbers by three, as they did to the MS numbers in the Southwick Codex. Here in *Beowulf*, though, they advance the first two folios by three, the next fifteen folios by two, the first misplaced folio (131) by eighteen, the next forty-two folios by three again; the second misplaced folio (197) is itself five in advance of the new number, after which the new numbers advance the MS by four for eight folios, and finally by three for the last folio. No one using the 1884 foliation could be expected to remember which two folios had been originally misplaced in the *Beowulf* MS, or to have been any clear conception of the reasons behind the wild discrepancies between the MS and the 1884 foliations. (83)

The problem with this attempt to reconcile, as Kiernan points out, is that we lose sight of the leaves that were misplaced, and consequently, any information we could gather from the paratexts as to how it occurred and why—both important paleographical questions when studying the history of the manuscript. The arrangement of the folios can reveal a variety of cultural perceptual insights. For example, in some instances, Sir Robert Cotton was known to have added leaves and folios of one manuscript to another one entirely if he felt the content was related or could provide a profound new interpretation of the original text. By erasing what we today see as a mis-foliation, we lose conceptions of the perceptions people throughout history had regarding the text because it was not in the 'proper' order.

While certain damages can be used to understand more about the text, other damages can virtually erase important paratexts from the manuscript all together. The rebinding, and resulting trimming, of the leaves eviscerated most substantial marginalia (except, curiously, on f. 209v, the last text leaf of the codex where the end of the *Judith* poem is filled in where it had been removed in pen). There are, however, smaller bits of marginalia (in both *Beowulf* and the other texts) that imply later readers consumed the codex for more enlightened, scholarly reason, as opposed to for entertainment alone (Thomson 257-258).

Without the margins, we lose any potential commentary from readers that could provide modern scholars with more clues about the texts within the codex or how they were perceived by the readers as time passed. Since the Nowell Codex is a composite that was combined with a second composite, the Southwick Codex, the original leaves were probably subjected to two rounds of trimming, as the texts were rebound two separate times that we can deduce, once for each of the two codices separately and another to bind them together (though it is almost undoubtedly more considering all the shuffling and late additions to the Nowell Codex alone).

Although, if the margins had survived rebinding, they most likely would have been damaged from the fire anyways (see f.209v), leaving us in a similar position—little to no surviving marginalia to tell us how previous readers interpreted the text.

As a result of the fire and the British Museum's efforts at the restoration of the manuscript, the individual leaves have been cut from the binding and pasted onto a frame of heavy paper (using a tape like-adhesive to hold the leaves in place) to prevent the leaves from curling—but the manuscript's last binding is still preserved separately by the British Museum (it can even be viewed on their website). The binding itself is unassuming, a simple marbled design, and only indicative of the style of cover from when the two codices became one. Beyond that, there is not much to derive from the binding independently.

The old adage may be 'don't judge a book by its cover', but presentation will also influence interpretation whether consciously or not. While we may all be guilty of this, the influence is easily seen children's literature. I remember going through my school's library as a child and never once picking up and reading a book whose cover did not first attract my eye. I was consciously looking for a certain type of text that would interest me, and, if I perceived it to be present through the cover, I would pick it up, read the book, find the adventure I was looking for, and be none the wiser of missing it in other books because of the confirmation bias. Children are the most vulnerable to marketing and design influences because they are unaware of the psychological research into understanding consumer choices and how marketers can exploit this knowledge to entice more sales. Aesthetic considerations such as cover design, font choice, and illustrations entail certain expectations from the reader on the book's contents, therefore influencing perception of the text, like what I described in the introduction with scary Comic Sans.

Of course, this applies to *Beowulf*, too. While the marbled cover of the manuscript may not seem particular attractive to modern audiences, who are used to colorful, eye-catching images on covers, to a 17th century European audience, having just discovered marbling from the Middle East, book with marbled designs on them were all the rage. However, not everyone knew the techniques to accomplish complex marbled designs, as seen on the Nowell/Southwick Codex, adding an element of prestige to the manuscript in the repository (this is all assuming the marbled cover was not added later in the 20th century just before it was donated to the British Museum, when marbling techniques became more commonly known). Marbling was even a way for banks to mark banknotes. All of this information points to the status associated with marbled documents, whether it be official validity, perceived high value, or the allure of rarity, the simple presence of the marbled cover changed the way readers handled and understood the codex in the 17th and 18th century.

The most intriguing discovery in the Nowell Codex, however, is the palimpsest of folio 179. This evidence, in particular, is highly debated amongst the *Beowulf* scholars. The palimpsest occurs at the junction of two distinct sections in the story of Beowulf—at the conclusion of the first arc, as Beowulf leaves Hrothgar after defeating the monsters (Grendel and his mother), and the beginning of the end of Beowulf's life (skimming over wars and his rise to king, before slowing down again to describe the dragon and his funeral). The pacing of the story changes drastically between the two sections, creating a notable shift for the reader. It almost feels as though the palimpsest is meant to bridge the gap between two different stories of one man's life—though this also may just be speculation, depending on which scholar is asked. Linking this evidence back to the original question of the date, Kiernan emphatically claims this as evidence of drafting, since the scribe completely rewrote the text on the page (though similar

to what was there originally as R. D. Fulk observes). Once again contrasted with Neidorf (and Fulk too this time), who believes there are several other sufficient explanations for the palimpsest's existence.

To once again liken the paratextual role of a palimpsest to more modern notions of book publications, a palimpsest is almost as if the author or the publisher published another version of the text. While this type of revision can be used for correcting errors, it can also be used to alter the reader's interpretation of the story entirely. An example of this is seen with the short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" by Raymond Carver. His editor, Gordon Lish, cut out significant portions of Carver's writing, rewrote scenes, and changed the language extensively, and when published, this version garnered a lot of praise. However, Carver felt as though he did not recognize his work anymore—that it had been so radically changed it was a different story entirely, he. even pondered removing the edited version from the publication—and went on to publish his own version later. To the reader, edits, or changes made to the text between when the author originally wrote it until it gets to the reader, are indistinguishable from authorial intent. Therefore, a reader may be led to believe that that is what the author intended all along for the text to say, but the reality can be exactly the opposite. With *Beowulf*'s palimpsest and other unseen edits and no second copy for comparison, scholars have no baseline to judge whether or not extensive changes have been made to the text.

Oftentimes, with older manuscripts, in order to derive the alterations scribes made to their copy text in the copying process, scholars would simply compare the copied text to the original or a separate copy of the same story to discover any divergences. With *Beowulf*, however, there is no second manuscript to reference, forcing scholars to make assumptions of editing from both paleographical and non-paleographical evidence. For example, we know errors were carefully

corrected in the text due to evidence of ink being removed for text to be rewritten and certain instances of scribe A writing the correct word as a superscript. However, it is unclear how much autonomy was exercised by the scribes in deviating from the source text (assuming they were copying and not drafting).

The text we have for *Beowulf* (that scholars give the most authority to since it is the only and oldest copy we have) could be a different version of the story, similar to a revised edition. In order to find the 'original' *Beowulf* text in that case, scholars would need to be able to discern between editorial choice and error—an almost impossible task without another copy for reference or the ability to ask the scribes themselves. This is important because if all *Beowulf* translations are based upon a different version of the text, readers at the minimum have to read two separate people's (likely differing) interpretation of the story, making it even more difficult for the reader to discern their own thoughts on the text from the various contributors'. Can it even be considered reading the real *Beowulf* at that point? This is why scholars try to determine if there was scribal editing and errors in addition to the degree of such alterations—in order to preserve what they believe to be the original composition that was *Beowulf*.

The physical manuscript containing *Beowulf* has been ripped apart, burned, and rebuilt throughout its lifetime. All scars have a story, and the *Beowulf* text has plenty, each influencing how it is presented and seen, both for the readers who have had the experience of reading the various forms of the text firsthand, and the readers who have read the text outside of the original manuscript that contains it, since the fire has rendered portions unretrievable (and therefore, those sections are un-reproduceable for modern printed versions). The result is that no matter what has changed from the text's inception to the form it remains in at the British Museum today, this is the only version of *Beowulf* we have. Every interpretation we create is based upon

the surviving manuscript, all the alterations to the manuscript included, whether it was intentional by those who possessed authoritative influence over the physical text or entirely accidental.

Scribal Influences

The choices a scribe makes when writing or copying a manuscript can also have a huge impact on the way we interpret a text. In the case of *Beowulf*, two different scribes contributed to the text, with the palimpsest at f.179 being where the second scribe took over (which is the Occam's Razor answer for the palimpsest's occurrence). Scholars have determined this by evaluating and comparing the scripts and handwriting across the codex. However, Simon Thomson argues that, due to the communal manuscript creation process, there could be several different scribes who contributed to the codex that we simply could not distinguish from analyzing the writing (Thomson 267-270). Therefore, there could be many different domino-effect types of unknown influences on the text (inconsistent handwriting leading to misconstrued letters leading to mistranslation leading to misinterpretation) that shape our perception of it.

The errors and corrections from the scribes also can be interpreted as evidence for either of the two opposing arguments on the date of the text including the palimpsest of folio 179 (according to the foliation Kiernan uses). As Kiernan observes, "This additional evidence also reveals truly exceptional interest in the poem by a scribe who is usually supposed to have been largely ignorant of its meaning, and so inattentive, careless, and lazy in copying it. As we have seen from the scribe's proofreading of his own work, these suppositions are untenable. But, in his proofreading of the first scribe's work, already carefully proofread by the first scribe, he picks up some decidedly minute oversights" (*Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* 272). Throughout

Beowulf, the second scribe diligently scraped and corrected words and phrases in the text and was also the one responsible for the palimpsest.

According to Kiernan, this type of editing is consistent with editing that would be done to a new story before the manuscript was finalized based on the large number of corrections in the text. He also claims, "We have about 180 positive examples of intelligent scrutiny on the part of the scribes" (195), which implies that the scribes actively engaged with the material of the text—not simply copying words from an exemplar. In this case, it is difficult to fully realize the amount of scribal engagement with a text, especially when there is no exemplar to compare what has changed from exemplar to copy. Without an exemplar (or any evidence of an older *Beowulf* text), scholars have no reference point for the materials the scribes worked with in order to produce the poem, thereby lending credence to dating the origin of *Beowulf* in the eleventh century is feasible, in that regard.

Neidorf, however, believes the corrections to support his argument that *Beowulf* is much older than the eleventh century. He accounts for the prolific errors as evidence that the scribes were unfamiliar with Old English and may not have fully understood what they were copying from an exemplar. There is an evident lack of knowledge from the scribes in understanding what the proper named should have looked like, as apparent from the sheer number of mistakes on the proper names alone, "Gerritsen's assessment of error in general becomes more pointed when applied to the scribal errors of proper names in particular. Whether the scribes introduced these errors into the text or merely transmitted the erroneous forms from their exemplar without correcting them, one conclusion is clear: the scribes were out of touch with the heroic-legendary traditions essential to the composition and comprehension of the text they were copying out" ("Scribal errors of proper names in the Beowulf manuscript" 295). Besides miswritten names

(like Beow/Beowulf), common nouns that probably were proper names miswritten include: Hreþric as hreþrinc (1836), Cain (probably to Cam first then) as camp (1261), Eomer to geomor (1960), and Heardrede as hearede (2202) (253-254). Following this logic, the scribes would have had a reduced level of engagement with the text since they were copying from an exemplar. This, however, does not mean that there were *no* diversions from the exemplar, it just means that modern scholars are challenged both with the lack of an exemplar for comparison and deciding between intention and error when attempting to identify the 'intelligent scrutiny' that Kiernan references.

On account of this, Bammesberger in "The Emendation of Beowulf, L.586" suggests that, in the case of a perceived eye skip (one of the most common errors), scholars should look for a perceptible reason as to whether the word (or words) as on L.586 were edited out intentionally or by accident. For an eye skip, it must be logical that the word skipped to was the same as the word left off from and that the word makes sense being used twice in close range. For intentional scribal edits, there needs to be a reason for why the word was removed (was it a word that was common for religious institutions to censor, etc.). In the absence of a discernable reason for either, a conclusion cannot be made for or against error over intention.

Assuming the scribes invented the story and all the relevant preceding assumptions for eleventh century construction to be true, the level of scribal engagement will not be a paratextual influence on interpretation. The scribes were the ones who made it, so there is no alteration to perception. However, assuming that the scribes copied *Beowulf* from an exemplar, scribal engagement and degree of influence becomes a much more pertinent question for interpretation. Take, for example, the common nouns Neidorf believes were originally proper names. When the scribes inadvertently changed those names to normal nouns, they accidentally cut out three

whole characters from the story. Obviously, this will impact the reader interpretation of the story away from what the author intended, even if they were minor characters. Additionally, interpretation can also be impacted on account of the way the now common nouns are translated into the story. Needless to say, scribe paratexts have the highest level of importance since they possess the greatest power to shape the readers' perceptions of *Beowulf* with no way to reference their presentation to another copy for comparison of reliability.

Circling back to the palimpsests now that the issue of scribal engagement has been addressed, R. D. Fulk, another scholar who seems to lean toward Neidorf's side, says,

> Likewise, it could be that the erasure of folio 179 of the *Beowulf* Manuscript results from an attempt to compose a less abrupt transition between two separate compositions and thus possibly indicates that the poem is contemporary with the making of the manuscript. But that is not the only plausible explanation; neither is it really the *most* plausible explanation, since in those few instances in which the letters of the original writing on the leaf can be made out, the words do not appear to be substantially different from those of the rewritten text. (*The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment* 20-21)

While one could *still* persist in believing the palimpsest to be evidence of scribal drafting in the manuscript, it would be much more likely if there was a hiccup that occurred when the scribes changed, causing the second scribe to wash the sheet and rewrite it. Continuing on, Fulk provides more evidence that makes drafting less probable,

> Moreover, a fair amount of evidence has been amassed to show that linguistic and stylistic features of the parts of the poem before and after the erased leaf are markedly similar, and they are different from features found in other poems: for example, *Beowulf*

> is the only poem that faithfully observes Kaluza's law in regard to etymologically light endings, as discussed below, and the two portions of the poem observe it with equal fidelity. It is thus hard to believe that *Beowulf* represents two independent compositions spliced clumsily together. And the rewritten text on the erased leaf is in places such bad Old English that it is thoroughly implausible that an Anglo-Saxon could have written it. (21)

Here, Fulk considers the linguistic evidence by levels of probability—weighing the more likely options against each other without explicitly choosing a side (though showing partiality for one in the name of probability). As it is in the vast majority of his scholarly articles on the subject, Fulk offers multiple different viewpoints and rationally explains each before determining the likelihood of that interpretation of evidence reflecting reality. In this way, he determines the most probable explanation is that the scribes writing the text did not know Old English and it does not seem that the two halves of the story were separate, rather they were one composition—eliminating both the story combination theory and drafting theory all in one fell swoop.

Furthermore, on the issue of linguistic archaisms, he later says, "The likeliest explanation for the frequency of the archaic spelling without *w* in personal names in *Beowulf*, when it is so rare elsewhere in the OE corpus, is that the scribes were copying an archaic exemplar. This explanation is reinforced by the meter of the poem, in which the word root in inflected forms must sometimes be scanned as light and is never required to be scanned as heavy, showing that the poet used the older forms, which were in use before the analogical lengthening took place" (*The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment* 26). Therefore, while he does not say that *Beowulf* was certainly copied from an archaic exemplar, he states that it is the most probable circumstance that

could cause the peculiar linguistics (for words, names, meter and grammar) that appear throughout the poem, squarely placing his view on the Neidorf side of the spectrum of scholarship.

In summation, since *Beowulf* was written in old Old English, it follows that the scribes who copied the poem in the eleventh century altered the text we know today as *Beowulf*, in effect making a "scribal version" of the text. As we all are now very familiar, this "scribal version" will differ from the author's original intent for the work, leaving modern readers with no way of knowing what changes were made and how they would interpret the text (or the story would change) if the poem was in its original form.

Conclusion

In the end, virtually every conclusion based on paleographical evidence is subjective—whether we look at the physical markers or the text itself. No one has observed the full history of *Beowulf*'s manuscript, and, as a result, we must speculate to fill in the blanks with what we have, which is a flawed practice in and of itself. There are nuances lost to time, misunderstood expression, and ways of thinking that completely depart from our own ideas. Additionally, the longer the history of the manuscript, the more opportunity those who handle it have time to supplement it; meaning, whether a scribe or reader, they have the opportunity to add to the text in some form or fashion (it can be anything from marginalia, to edits, or even coffee stains). Each little bit adds to the story of the manuscript and can influence the interpretations of modern readers.

For the physical evidence, like marginalia, foliation, and manuscript construction, we uncover hints to the way people understood *Beowulf* as a text and how they perceived and treated

the text varies from our own way of doing things. The evidence of scribal proofing demonstrates the care that went into preserving the manuscript, and while this could just be the diligence of the scribe, it could also be an indicator of the perceived value of *Beowulf* as a text seen through the meticulousness with which it was treated. Hundreds, maybe thousands of people have had contact with the manuscript over the centuries, some of whom have had various degrees of authority over how the text has been presented to others—each possessing a unique view of the text and each leaving with their own opinion which can have lasting effects on how we see the text today.

It is impossible to read a text without interpreting it in some way. Therefore, it follows that our perception of a text will vary depending on both the experiences of the individuals and the paratexts or context provided to the reader for consideration. In the case of the Nowell Codex, clearly, there are several points of intrigue in this regard, with the date of the poem's origin having the most influence on how we perceive the poem. In fact, numerous paratextual points discussed above also rely heavily on the determination of a date, such as scribal influences and how we understand the evidence from the physical manuscript. It is such a crucial determinate of conception and foundational to understanding, and yet for now, it remains an unanswerable question.

In the end, I believe Roy Liuzza puts it best, "Logically the establishment of a date and historical milieu for a poem ought to precede and assist its interpretation, but in the case of *Beowulf* the dating itself is an act of interpretation, in some respects one of the hermeneutic activities most productive of knowledge of the poem and its meanings; reading this undated text reminds us of the fragility of our knowledge of Old English literary culture and the pervasiveness

of interpretive activity in even the simplest matters of dating and context" (*Beowulf: Basic Readings* 295).

With *Beowulf*, there is no author to turn to for meaning. And, with that element removed, there are endless variations and iterations of interpretation to be derived from the clues of the text as it is today. What significance we assign to it, the historical knowledge we glean from it—all of this is left to our own discretion, unbound by the restrictions having definitive answers placed on a text. This also enables scholars to assign importance or authority to some evidence more than others. Since it is all subjective anyway, who am I to tell someone that their theory is incorrect if it isn't contradicted by the text? That is the point of studying English and literature, to find our own preferred interpretation and defend it until proven otherwise, then find a new one. The paratextual evidence guides interpretation but does not intrinsically give a story meaning—that responsibility lies with the reader. Without someone around to do the interpreting, a text is nothing more than a series of words.

CHAPTER 2: Influential Intangible Paratexts

Introduction

While tangible paratexts can offer us a physical recounting of *Beowulf*'s history as an artifact, when that evidence is considered in conjunction with intangible paratexts, it can enlighten us to the reception and perception of the text throughout its history. By understanding the range of interpretations that have arisen iteratively (with time), modern scholars can garner insight into the values or ways of thinking of people who lived in a very different world than our own by dissecting their views of a text—in this case *Beowulf*, a text which has a particularly rich history. The intangible paratextual discourse in this chapter will expand upon topics introduced in the thesis introduction and Chapter 1, such as the effect of historical context on the content the author produces and how we interpret the text (the Jane Austen example), and I will elaborate on the context for cultural perception for Cnut's reign, as the natural progression from the obvious physical evidence to less quantifiable, more abstract influences on the text.

This chapter of the thesis explores how these interpretations come about and ascribes reasons as to why they can be so diverse from one another historically, as in understanding past interpretations and the environments that produced them, depicting how even though the text itself stays (relatively) constant, people will continue to contextualize the content with their own circumstances to form a unique interpretation either specific to that person or to their society. By recognizing people's past thoughts on *Beowulf*, modern scholars can observe the progression of conception (the iterative, changing views) on the text and learn why it has changed with time. In

turn, this exposes the line of progression which produced our modern notions on the text and the biases toward certain conclusions that it entails.

For example, though there is no way to definitively determine the degree of fact and fiction in *Beowulf*, contextualizing the work with its related historical and cultural connotations can add to the probability of there being historical truth (or lack thereof). How do we know what really happened and what is fabrication—where do we draw the line between reality and fiction in *Beowulf*? Today, we label books as fiction, non-fiction, creative non-fiction, or somewhere in between the wide range of genres and types. When reading *Beowulf* nowadays, we read about the monsters like giants and dragon, not to mention extreme physical feats like swimming for a week straight in full armor, and immediately assume that it must be fiction. Without the added paratexts of the archeological research acknowledging that several places described in the poem exist, a modern reader would not think twice about dismissing *Beowulf* as a completely unreliable historical narrative. However, even in fiction, there are kernels of truth that reflect reality—bits inspired by the life of the author or their culture that unconsciously guide the path the story takes. Unraveling these hidden gems provides cognizance into history that ordinary textbooks or historical documents cannot capture or describe on their own.

I hope to explore this issue of retroactively assigning genre to *Beowulf*, explaining why this blanketed type of categorization, a system which did not appear until well after *Beowulf* was written, limits interpretations of the text—in addition to questioning *Beowulf*'s place in the Nowell Codex's genre as well. To achieve all of this, it is imperative to carefully consider the social connotations surrounding the story and how it changes through the years—attempting to answer the question of why it was written and how it comes to garner new meaning with specific cultural context. In this chapter, I will consider the influence of historical context, religious

influences, and cultural reception on the perception of the Nowell Codex. Looking at the history, I will describe the dispute over identifying the Geats of *Beowulf*, genealogical naming conventions, and refer to archeological concerns which give credence to *Beowulf* being an oral history rather than entirely fiction. For religious influences, as the go-between for history and culture, I will evaluate the use of the Christian and Scandinavian religious perspectives in the text—how they interact with each other and why Christianity is in *Beowulf* in the first place. Lastly, cultural reception will mostly cover the Nowell Codex themes and why those texts were chosen for the composite in the eleventh century. The evidence derived from this section will simultaneously show the differences in beliefs on *Beowulf* through time while also indicating how these important paratexts (history, religion, and culture) still influence how we perceive and discuss the text today.

Historical Connotation: Fact or Fiction?

Depending on the date *Beowulf* originates from, the likelihood of the events from the texts being historical changes. If *Beowulf* is indeed older than its eleventh century manuscript, it is possible that the poem is based off of an oral epic meant to recall a great hero from Scandinavian history. However, as with all mythological stories, the fantastical elements of the text prevent scholars from seriously considering that *Beowulf* represents part of history. While it may seem unlikely due to the mythical nature of the monsters Beowulf fights, multiple descriptions in the poems have the potential to be very real—lining up with archeological evidence found in our world. In "*Beowulf* and Archeology," Catherine Hills details the specific evidence that has suggested a degree of truth to the tale,

> These authors had the benefit of two remarkable archeological excavations, which seemed to put the reality of the things and places described in *Beowulf* beyond doubt. The discovery of the treasure in Mound I at Sutton Hoo in 1939 provided the arms, armor, regalia, gold, and silver to match any poet's imagination. The author of *Beowulf* need not have been fantasizing. It all really existed, in Suffolk in the seventh century. (*A Beowulf Handbook* 294)

Even if we cannot find the exact treasure mound referenced in *Beowulf*, archeologists have confirmed that they do exist, meaning despite certain parts of the story seeming improbable (or even impossible), there is still a basis in reality for the physical locations and material culture described in the text. Moreover, the time frame in which these treasure mounds existed supports the case for *Beowulf* to be older than its manuscript age, since it provides accurate historical details to the estimated time the poem depicts.

In this case, the paratextual knowledge concerning the historical and archeological accuracy of the poem depicting events from the sixth century lends itself to an origin of closer to that time—perhaps the seventh century, the same period dated for the treasure mound discovered at Sutton Hoo. The archeological evidence also suggests other locations described by the poem were founded in the reality of that era. Keeping this information in mind as we read the text, it is not difficult to believe that since the geographical locations are real, that Hereot might be, too. And further, if Hereot becomes real, then the man who built it could be real also.

In addition to this, it is probable that King Hygelac existed at some point due to the frequency of his appearance in other Old English poems (296). In fact, it is more likely for Hygelac to have been real than it is for Beowulf based on the information scholars have today.

Since Hygelac's story is also pretty consistent within his universe of stories, at the very least, he was a well-known figure as more of a main character in other poems, and the *Beowulf* poet could have included Hygelac as a way to lend authority to their spin-off focused on Beowulf, who could have been a minor character in some lost version of these other poems. I have always believed there to be elements of truth in mythological stories, specifically regarding the people the story is based upon. Oral traditions were the way people preserved history before there was easy access to things like paper and styluses—it was the method with which heroes were memorialized. While the details of their deeds maybe have been exaggerated or skewed over time, the person remains.

Therefore, while some of *Beowulf*'s feats may seem fantastical or exaggerated, it is not appropriate to label the text as being fiction. *Beowulf* existed before the genre categorization system and, as a result, is not beholden to its restrictions of being one or the other (fact or fiction), yet we still search for definitive proof of its historical value knowing that it will alter how we view the text. Obtaining evidence pointing to the truths in *Beowulf* would cause scholars to begin analyzing the text more like a historical record and to search for what new information the text can contribute to what we know of Scandinavian history.

In order to better understand *Beowulf*'s claim to history, it is important to also consider it from the perspective of literary history, not just treating it as an artifact. Oftentimes, scholars get so focused on the technical details of *Beowulf* that they overlook it as an art form and are incapable of approaching the issue from the angle. Joseph Harris outlines this phenomenon,

> *Beowulf* criticism, fixated on the unifying 'idea' and determined to follow Tolkien in restoring the monsters to the center, has overlooked the poem's anthology-like characteristics and therefore its place in literary history. The *Beowulf*ian *summa* includes

> genealogical verse, a creation hymn, elegies, a lament, a heroic lay, a praise poem, historical poems, a flyting, heroic boasts, gnomic verse, a sermon, and perhaps less formal oral genres…As a whole, then, *Beowulf* presents a unique poet's unique reception of the oral genres of the Germanic early middle ages. (Harris 17)

Though Harris initiates the conversation on the literary conventions, he is more interested in prompting scholarly readers into further exploration of the topic, rather than fully composing an argument himself. However, Harris does make a valid point, why aren't more people talking about the various literary conventions in *Beowulf*? Why is it a secondary consideration? As a literary work, *Beowulf* is wholly one of a kind. From the language it's written in to its construction, poetic motifs, and content, *Beowulf* is unlike any other text still in existence.

There are so many different things to explore with *Beowulf* as an artifact, I feel as though scholars sometimes forget that it is also a piece of literature and as such have a tendency to overlook what it accomplishes as a literary work. In "The Monsters and the Critics," Tolkien echoes a similar sentiment, but recommends reinstating the importance of the monsters in a metaphorical sense as the topic that should be the focus of literary discourse. Thus, by developing a theory of what metaphorical purposes the monsters may or may not serve, we can see how the mythical and historical interact. By restricting ourselves to the pursuit of either history or literary significance for a text, we become unable to see the composition as a whole.

Hills demonstrates the issue with that type of binary thinking in "*Beowulf* and Archeology"; that the biggest problem with archeological research is not necessarily what one would imagine,

> Epics based on historical events for which we have alternative sources, like the *Song of Roland*, show how cavalier the treatment of the historical fact can and could be. Minor

> figures could assume central importance; battles could change their date, their location, and even their protagonists. This could very easily have happened with *Beowulf*: indeed, it seems quite likely since, although minor figures, notably Hygelac, seem to have some historical basis for their existence, Beowulf himself is notably lacking from any other historical or literary account. There may be a considerable kernel of historical fact embedded in *Beowulf*, or we may be wasting our time looking for a 'real' Heorot. Another point made by Finley is that we are very selective in our search for history in epics. Schliemann set out to find Troy and claimed to have looked on the face of Agamemnon. He did not climb up Mount Olympus to look for Zeus. Similarly, we have looked for the hall at Heorot, for helmets and swords and even Beowulf's grave. No one has tried to dig up Grendel, his mother, or the dragon. Can we be sure we have distinguished correctly between the mythical and the historical? (*A Beowulf Handbook* 296-298)

The truth is, we cannot know what is real versus imaginative beyond a doubt when researching the historical value of a piece like *Beowulf*. We cannot know the degree of reality; therefore, wouldn't it be better to pursue all possibilities while trying to gather evidence? Keeping an open mind to new ideas is the best way to perpetuate interpretation and ensure that the next generation will value the story as well, not feeling forced into choosing a predetermined interpretative path based upon the research that began long before they were born. Enabling people to be curious about *Beowulf* will be what ultimately brings new scholars into these discussions. I believe that Grendel, his mother, and the dragon were real. At the very least, each must have been inspired by *something*, whether literarily or otherwise, and thus, is an angle of *Beowulf* worth pursuing.

Historical Connotation: A History of a Mystery People

Considering how little we know of *Beowulf*'s place in history, what meager context scholars do possess largely direct areas of research. One of those topics in particular is centered around where exactly the *Beowulf* poem comes from—was it created by the elusive Geats or perhaps the English? Due to the probability of Hygelac's existence and archeological evidence uncovered, numerous scholars have tried to assign Beowulf and the Geats to a specific Germanic tribe as a way to identify whose history the poem recounts. While there are many opposing arguments for who the Geats of *Beowulf* were—or at least who they were meant to actually represent—scholar Jane Leake notes the probable use of Geats as a generalization for numerous people groups tracing back to Greek and Roman literature. As the legends of this group of people continued to grow, 'Geats' became synonymous with multiple peoples, culminating into its generalized use during the Medieval Period to represent all people from the northernmost lands in Europe (the Scandinavian Peninsula). She believes the Geats can be traced back through the Getae and Geatas references in classical literature, which etymologically makes sense seeing as (based on the two forms she provides) the noun appears to only have a plural Latin 1st declension form (again, making sense if it is used to refer to the group of people). It is not a stretch to believe that Getae/Geatas would convert to Geats over time, especially if Geatas is an irregular genitive form (and considering there is a stem change, this is a possibility), but without more information, the base assumption is that Geatas is an accusative plural Latin form.

While her argument does have plenty of merit on its own, Leake also evaluates the previously held scholarly debates on if the Geats are the Jutes or the Gautar, both of which were popular theories among scholars to analyze their merits,

> Since it can no longer be held that England in this period was isolated from the rest of Europe, it seems highly unlikely that the Gautar, one of the principal northern tribes, became unknown to the English and that their own name for them became confused with another people. In any case, they did not fade into oblivion anywhere else. The evidence of medieval maps and geological treatises testifies that the Gautar, undoubtedly because of their recognized connection to the famous Goths, were of far more interest to the Middle Ages than the Swedes themselves. (*The Geats of Beowulf: A Study in the Geographical Mythology of the Middle Ages* 101)

Immediately, it is evident the improbability of assuming that a series of mistakes eventually led to the Gautar being misnamed as the Geats. Despite the possibility of translation causing the shift in spelling from Gautar to Geatas, as Leake points out, Gautar was the English's name for them. In other words, since the text is written is Old English, it is unlikely that Gautar becomes Geats for a text written in English—it would remain Gautar. Also, because Geatas is used by Roman and Greek scholars, like Ptolemy, centuries prior, it seems unlikely that Gautar is the origin of Geatas, but they could still be related.

She continues by taking issue with the reason the Jutes and Gautar were assumed to be the only possibility of being the Geats to begin with, dissecting the heart of the issue of perspective in this debate,

> These errors—and they are errors only to our way of thinking—are not isolated phenomena, to be gotten rid of individually by a variety of different explanations. They all reflect the basic misconception vital to the problem of identity of the Geatas: that the Jutes were Goths and that both were descended from the Getes. It is a notion perfectly

> understood by the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century antiquarians when they comment on or repeat the passage from Bede, divorced from the presuppositions that led critics of *Beowulf* into the Jute-Gaut controversy. (109)

Due to the generalization of the northern tribes in Europe, ascribing one particular tribe to the legend of *Beowulf* is a challenge. However, even though there was generalization, modern scholars assuming there to be generalization in *every* case is also an error of generalization. Leake explicitly notes the improbability in this instance of either the Jutes or Gautar being misidentified and, in essence, encourages scholars to have an open mind when approaching the challenge of identifying the Geats.

Understanding who the Geats were (or if they existed at all) will influence how we read the text of *Beowulf*, seeing as host culture is an important paratext for contextualizing the information provided, potentially raising ethical concerns about the representation of the host culture if the text did not originate from the culture it depicts; however, tracing tribe names is not the only approach scholars have implemented in order to uncover the group of people responsible for inspiring *Beowulf*. Sam Newton attempts to determine the legend's place of origin through incorporating the genealogies and royal naming conventions included in the text as well as the archeological factors,

> The proposal is then as follows: through a consideration of the relation of Beowulf to surviving Anglo-Saxon royal pedigrees, East Anglia emerges as the kingdom most likely to have fostered the poem's prominent Danish dynastic concerns, insofar as a Scylding genealogical affinity is identifiable through two names listed in the ancestral tally of King Ælfwald. If this proposal is acceptable, we would have grounds for a claim that Beowulf

> could have been composed in East Anglia during King Ælfwald's reign (ca 713-749). As far as we can tell, Ælfwald's kingdom possessed the means for the composition and preservation of the poem. (*The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* 133-134)

Instead of looking for *Beowulf*'s specific tribe (where the oral origin would be), Newton hypothesizes where the poem was first written (assuming the eleventh century manuscript is a copy). Since they had both the means and same naming conventions, not to mention only being just over a century removed from the time the events the text is supposed to represent and having a heavy Germanic influence, East Anglia is a likely candidate for *Beowulf*'s inception insularly. This means it is probable for *Beowulf*'s first appearance in England to have been in East Anglia, and theoretically, where it was first written down. As for the archeological evidence stemming from the conflicting interpretations on Beowulf's funeral rites, he says,

> Taken together, these suggestions provide some degree of corroboration for the current archaeological indications that the legend of the boat-borne royal foundling may have been maintained in the pre-Viking kingdom of East Anglia. The corollary of this claim is that East Anglia may also have been the source of the West Saxon version of the legend, which…appears to be a retrospective genealogical elaboration dating from the late ninth century and probably derived from an earlier English dynastic source. (139)

Essentially, Newton implies that the current "West Saxon" version of the poem was a product of retrospective additions made by the East Anglians, consequently also implying that there was another version of *Beowulf* that existed before these edits were made. Perhaps the new edition

including the late ninth century genealogical elaboration was their way of updating the historical record so that they could continue to preserve and retell their history in terms that the then modern day could understand. It is just like how today we update history books with new editions containing more recent events, or how the English monarchy was updated to denote King Charles III as the newest British monarch upon Queen Elizabeth II's death. To the East Anglians, *Beowulf* would be part of their history, not a fantasy, and therefore would have been treated as a record of their ancestry. Today, we approach the story with greater skepticism, distrusting the reliability of the narrator to faithfully describe history, instead favoring extensive cross-examination of historical data we do have, rather than taking what is said at face value. This, of course, is not a bad thing, however, there is so little evidence and so much unknown that it cannot possibly cover all facets of the text. Thus, we must speculate on the questionable pieces, which that supplementation creates a variety of interpretations, with different people filling in each piece uniquely.

Therefore, while it would be wrong to assign *Beowulf* full historical authority, it would also be irresponsible to dismiss its historical value because we cannot prove it beyond a reasonable doubt. The reason why we have theories (instead of just laws) in research is because it is impossible to prove certain theories because we cannot observe them. It's the same with history. We cannot observe first-hand what has happened in the past, so we rely on the reports of people who did. However, in doing so, we have to trust that the narrator is reliable and recognize that there will be bias in their descriptions. This is also why historians are constantly revising textbooks, as more information or reports are unearthed, the more reference materials there are to compare and contrast with each other, providing a broader, more comprehensive picture of the history. In *Beowulf*'s case the closest thing to alternative information we have are the paratexts

surrounding the text since there is no second manuscript to compare versions, and we cannot ask the author directly.

Individually, no piece of evidence can prove one theory over another, but taken together, the historical contexts of archeology, content of the story, and genealogical naming conventions can provide a degree of probability for elements of it being representative of history. Along the same vein of genealogical naming conventions, Philip Shaw hypothesizes as to how the legend came to be in the form that it is today,

> In summary, the evidence presented and analysed here suggests that *Beowulf* is in part the imaginative work of an Old English poet who created some figures such as Wiglaf and also incorporated English royal genealogical tradition into the poem – but this accounts for only small parts of the narrative. The main narrative of the poem, depicting Beowulf against the backdrop of the Scylding, Scilfing and Geatish dynasties, as well as many of the significant digressions, were drawn by the poet from some Continental Germanic source or sources. It is probable, moreover, that some of this narrative material was transmitted from the Continent to England in written form. The Continental Germanic source(s), moreover, combine figures who must have been created in a Continental Germanic context with figures who appear to have formed part of Scandinavian heroic tradition. This poem is not simply an Old English poem, nor yet just an English treatment of Scandinavian traditional material; in order to appreciate the poem within its context of production, we need to acknowledge that it owes a very great deal to Continental Germanic heroic narrative tradition. (*Names and Naming in "Beowulf": Studies in Heroic Narrative Tradition* 177-178)

Is *Beowulf* a Continental Germanic story or an English story? It is more probable that someone entrenched in Continental Germanic culture could accurately represent that type of literature than an English outsider. Even if parts of the story have been altered, at its core, literarily, plot-wise, and linguistically, *Beowulf* is a Continental Germanic story. The alterations simply demonstrate that Europe was more connected than we thought at that point, and therefore, who the story belongs to can also depend on the reader's perspective. It does not use Scandinavia as a backdrop for a story about Englishmen, like *Heart of Darkness* does with Africa. *Beowulf* is a truly Scandinavian story that engages with the culture.

As indicated earlier (and will be elaborated on a bit more in Chapter 3), knowing where a story comes from is important for several reasons. For instance, using the *Heart of Darkness* example, the author's biases and opinions can be manifested in a text, which can then be an unethical representation of the culture they are trying to depict. There is a debate as to whether *Heart of Darkness* is a story about Africa or about England that takes place in Africa. Considering that Joseph Conrad is an Englishman, the story is framed by scenes in England, and the dehumanizing representation of Africans in the novella, I believe most people would claim the story to be about English colonization. The paratext of the author's country of origin (England) also lends itself to this interpretation. However with *Beowulf*, once again, we do not know anything about the author and can only speculate as to the country/tribe of origin, making it extremely difficult to verify the historical validity, since we do not know what (or who's) history to compare it to. Additionally, there is the issue of ethically and accurately representing a culture that is not the author's within the text that they are writing. If *Beowulf* truly was written by the eleventh century scribes, how can scholars trust that they did justice to depicting sixth century Scandinavian culture? These are questions that, while they cannot be definitively

answered with our current knowledge, are concerns that can influence our perception of the contents and representation of the text. Further, through the evaluating the intangible paratextual information for such issues, new ways of thinking about the authorial voice in *Beowulf* emerge.

Religious Influences

Assigning to whom the narrative voice belongs is another important part contributing to a reader's interpretation of a text. But like the discussion of an author in the introduction says, the narrative voice is made up of numerous indistinguishable voices, which is undoubtedly what we see in *Beowulf*—specifically with the two distinct religious voices throughout the text. Despite Beowulf being a pagan hero, there are distinct elements of Christianity throughout the story. There are two main ways scholars rationalize the influence of Christianity on the story that are once again linked to the date of the poem.

If we believe *Beowulf* to originate from the eleventh century, the reason for the Christian influence is self-explanatory. The story was created by Christian monks in order to reconcile paganism with Christianity, potentially as a way to bring the two groups together—or at the very least to reignite the topic of conversion (*The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment* 201). The ability for the scribes to add the Christian element to the pagan story further aligns with the Chapter 1 case for high scribal engagement and the eleventh century origin. Due to the specific cultural and political climate of eleventh century England (described in detail under Cultural Reception), there is motivation for Christian scribes to alter pagan stories, presumably like *Beowulf*, to assist the blending of the two religions and cultures. However, if the text had been written or copied any time after the seventh century, due to religious conversion, there would

have been motive to add Christian influences, but since we know the physical manuscript was constructed in the eleventh century, I will focus on eleventh century motivations.

Under this assumption both Cnut, who was from Denmark and eventually became the King of England, Denmark and Norway in the eleventh century (the first half of *Beowulf* takes place in Denmark, making it partly a Danish text, as well), and the church are asserting their authority in order to create a new text with a specific purpose in mind, which, of course, would make them the collective authors of *Beowulf*. Furthermore, with that conception of the authors, we could interpret *Beowulf* as a purposeful religious and cultural text, attempting to solidify relations across two distinct groups of people. In a way, the authors were trying to instruct their Christian audience that people who were raised as pagans have a semblance of common belief and that they can therefore coexist. If this is true, *Beowulf*, could almost be considered political propaganda, and as such provides an interesting snapshot into the complex issue of religion in England during the eleventh century. Deciphering both the role religion played in the writing of the original *Beowulf* poem and how religion has influenced it since reveals how the book was both intended to be and actually received at various point in time by the readers.

On the other hand, if the story really does originate as an oral Scandinavian history, the Christian influences, on the surface, may feel out of place. Why would a Scandinavian story depicting the sixth century have a Christian voice narrating, if it was not created in the eleventh century? One theory is that the Christianity is a result of religious censorship, since there is, of course, evidence of scribes removing portions of the *Beowulf* text (the palimpsests and other lines like the first three on 180v have been intentionally removed). However, as Marijane Osborn notes in "The Great Feud: Scriptural History and Strife in *Beowulf*" that, upon reading the text, the references to Christianity read like a narration of a pagan story by a Christian—meaning the

Christian perspective frames the text but refrains from engaging with it beyond providing a Christian explanation, to a presumably Christian reader, for what occurs in the story. She explicates,

> With decorum and subtlety the Christian poet introduces a perspective inaccessible to his protagonists, in such a way that it will enhance, but not interfere with, his tale of noble (and in some sense ancestral) pagans. He establishes two complementary frames of reference, one heroic and one cosmic. The former aligns us, the audience, with the native Germanic world within the poem, while the latter aligns us with the Christian world of the poet. (*Beowulf: Basic Readings* 111-112)

The narrator acts as an observer or witness to the events of the poem, writing down his understanding of what he sees come to pass. An example of this being the description of Grendel, a giant, whose existence explained by his being a descendant of Cain, who according to Christian belief, had descendants that interbred with the watchers (fallen angels), which is where giants and demons come from—in this way the narrator reconciles pagan myth with Christian belief. With this style of reporting, while the voice of the narrator does have authority over the presentation of information to the reader, by being removed from the narrative itself, the Christian poet would have seemingly less authority over the text's content, only influencing, not orchestrating.

If this religious framing theory holds true, the oral story came first, with the Christian element added later, when it was penned down, as a means to make the story more suitable to a Christian audience. Relatedly, Thomas Hill compares *Beowulf* to analogous literary conversion accounts from other cultures in order to estimate how far removed the story was perhaps written

after the religious shift, "The various vernacular texts in Irish or Old Norse-Icelandic which treat the heroes of the pagan past sympathetically are not all dated to the era of the conversion itself, but they are close enough to that era that the fact of the conversion and the problems which it raised were still an immediate part of the cultural memory of the various poets and saga writers who composed these texts" (*The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment* 201). Therefore, he concedes that while the evidence is not conclusive for dating the origin of the text, it is more likely that it was written closer to the point of pagan cultures' conversion to Christianity rather than farther apart. Essentially this means the treatment of religion in the text is indicative of a society in this religious inflexion point and is a product of that conversion environment.

Whatever the case for the cause, there are two distinct religious perspectives within *Beowulf*, one Christian and the other rooted in Scandinavian mythology. Elements from each religion, both allusions and narrative aspects, are evident in various points throughout the poem. These elements are interwoven to such a degree that to lose one religious voice would have a massive impact on how we interpret the story; it would lose an integral layer of complexity. Osborn states, "There is no pagan-Christian 'problem' in *Beowulf*, as scholars have argued for over a century and a half, usually showing their prejudices by taking one side or the other. Rather than being in opposition, these two elements form an epistemological scheme embracing both secular and spiritual understanding" (*Beowulf: Basic Readings* 122). Osborn also contends that the speculation on God throughout the poem (like in Hrothgar's sermon) represent the actual paganists' spiritual speculation that occurred culturally after being introduced to religions like Christianity—not necessarily that they believed Christianity, but that they were beginning to ponder what was really out there and what does life after death look like (120). Logically

speaking, Osborn's consideration lines up with Hill's about religious introspection as a result of two distinct cultures interacting.

As a result, the seemingly opposing elements tell a new story of spiritual speculation—one altogether different from the perspective that either religion could produce on its own. In other words, we can interpret the use of religion in *Beowulf* as a means to push one set of ideals over the other, or it can be interpreted as a reflection upon clashing philosophies in an attempt to reconcile them and unify the people who believe one over the other. Regardless, *Beowulf* captures a phenomenon indicative of a world that was changing around the people who lived in it.

Cultural Reception

For the vast majority of history, religious belief was considered part of a group of people's cultural identity, so this section will expand on that influence further as other influential paratextual information surrounding politics and the changing cultural climate are described for the eleventh century audience. In order to derive a better idea of how an eleventh century English culture received *Beowulf*, one method is to look at the way the people contextualized the text with the other works in the codex—especially in the instance of a composite codex like the Nowell Codex. Composites are individual texts that been put together in a codex for a specific purpose. With close scrutiny, analyzing commonalities between the chosen texts illuminates the interpretative connections the audience made between the once individual stories.

While the texts of the Nowell Codex composite may initially appear unrelated to one another to the modern reader (with two non-canon fragmentary Christian stories, a bestiary, an epistemological story on the historical Alexander the Great, and, of course, a Scandinavian epic),

the choice to combine these texts into a single codex was very much so intentional. As mentioned previously, the idea of a parvus librus (little library) provides insight into the rationale behind pairing certain texts together to achieve a specific goal. For the Nowell Codex, the uniqueness of each text account for their combination, "The diversity of texts in the Nowell Codex, so many of which are translations, draws attention to their English production: that each is so different from the others, and so estranged from the historical context of their production, makes this 'strangeness' into a feature just as, or even more, visible in the eleventh century as it is today" (Thomson 46). Individually, each of the texts exist in other forms outside of the Nowell Codex (even *Beowulf*, on account of the evidence Kiernan references of pre-fire reports calling *Beowulf* a separate codex), however, there is no indication that this particular combination of stories had ever before been compiled. The eleventh century audience was meant to engage with these texts in a specific way, and in order to achieve that perception, these texts were specifically chosen to be combined into a single manuscript. As a result, the other texts in the codices serve as paratexts for *Beowulf*—it helps us conclude how the story was meant to be received in eleventh century England's cultural context.

Beowulf is an especially interesting case study in this regard since we have not just one, but two composite codices around the prime text that afford us the opportunity to see an eleventh century audience's interpretation of *Beowulf* (through the Nowell Codex) and the later eighteenth century audience's thought process through the combination of the Nowell and Southwick codices. What similarities did Robert Cotton see between the two codices that demanded they be combined into one?

While it is difficult to ascribe one all-encompassing genre to a composite codex, there are several themes and parallels that connect the texts together. Thomson indicates in "Communal

Creativity in the Making of the *Beowulf* Manuscript: Towards a History of Reception for the Nowell Codex" that the main idea with the composition of the Nowell Codex could have been to tell stories about places outside of England. Despite the fact that the codex is written entirely in Old English, the codex itself does not contain English-centered content,

> All narratives apart from *Beowulf* circulated more widely in Latin forms. *Wonders* is elsewhere found as a dual-language text and Nowell's copy (or a recent antecedent) was probably copied from an exemplar that had the Latin alongside Old English. This seems to be a codex at least partially defined by a decision to exclude Latin. The phenomenon appears all the more striking when one considers how little interest the texts have in England and Englishness" but he concedes, "On the other hand, not many Old English codices do spend time in England. (45)

This is an especially pertinent observation when considering the historical moment the composite was put together and that history has the potential to partially account for the acute English interest in outsiders, if pursued a little further.

Each story relates in some way to travel, and all but *The Marvels of the East* also include how different places interact as hosts for traveling outsiders. Furthermore, these outsiders entering foreign lands bring death in each of the stories. During the eleventh century, Cnut had just taken control over England, an outsider bringing death and destruction, ultimately leading to societal upheaval. Thomson goes on to explain this connection between Cnut and travel literature in more detail, "Another idea explored by these texts which resonates in Cnut's reign is that of travel. All five texts seem to play with the idea of individuals moving from one place to another; often, the one travelling is seen as threatening by the residents while the texts invite the audience

to be sympathetic to their (unusually triumphant) travellers" (51). This is an important theme of the codex because it directly correlates to the changing perception of Cnut during the eleventh century—the scary traveler causing change were common ideas during this time for this reason. As mentioned before with the religious coloring of *Beowulf*, the text can almost be seen as propaganda with this paratextual historical knowledge. While it may not have always been the intended goal at its inception, *Beowulf* came into this role because of the historical political machinations during the eleventh century to frame the original text with similar outsider stories, deliberately prompting new readers to interpret the text in a way that was favorable to Cnut's public image.

For further context into why Cnut had to use this type of propaganda in the first place, Thomson says,

> England's early experiences of his [Cnut's] temperament were not positive: most infamously, in 1014, fleeing England immediately after his father's death, Cnut had the hostages he was holding mutilated and set ashore in Lindsey. Even ignoring the decades of raiding in which Cnut participated with his father, his re-invasion and war with Edmund Ironside in 1016 was brutal, with bloody and destructive battles at Penselwood, Sherston and the unidentified *Assandum* as well as the siege of London and other engagements in Mercia. The vast majority of English families must have included men who were disfigured, disabled, or dead as a result of their new king's invasive journey: physical and emotional scars which would not have receded swiftly from sight or memory. Once king, however—as has been well-documented elsewhere—Cnut was concerned to present himself as civilised and Christian. He was enormously generous to

> the Church in England and France…It is precisely the process that the Nowell Codex repeatedly explores… (55-56)

Therefore, regardless of when and why the actual stories were individually created, the eleventh century audience (with Cnut's reign as a historical and cultural paratext for understanding) interpreted the collection to reflect their own circumstances—an invasive outsider uprooting the old and bringing positive change through destruction and death. The codex was curated this way in order to evoke that interpretation of the works more clearly than the stories could have individually. While the theme is an integral part of *Beowulf*'s story, reading the work on its own probably would not prompt the modern reader to think deeply about the implication or connection to outsiders and positive change—this was lost on me in my reading. However, this would be an extremely relevant issue in eleventh century England, and therefore it would be a more obvious interpretation for that audience, especially when paired with other texts containing the same message. Therefore, the compiling of these works becomes more compelling as a parvus librus, teaching the perception that outsiders can bring good change too, not just death. And since the church was the one receiving the most monetary benefit of Cnut's reign, it is no surprise they may have been the ones so willing to create such a composite to support him and positively influence his reputation amongst the people, or even explain why they preserved such unconventional texts in the first place.

Conclusion

Literary works are ultimately products of their time. They create a window into that past that offers a deeper understanding of societal concerns than a history book could by entrenching

the reader in that world. Reading a historical report is not the same as reading literature that originated in the period; there is no substitute for the nuances that can be derived from literature. Even if the work is completely fictitious, it is impossible to remove the effects an author's history has on their writing. Authors are shaped by their environments, therefore, whether they realize it or not, they provide a glimpse into a society and way of thinking that reflects an aspect of their history. It is important to realize that while we must interpret literature, we each also interpret things like our surroundings, circumstances, experiences, and relationships as our story—one that is the foundation for how we contextualize all other stories. This is one of the reasons scholars must continue to analyze *Beowulf* for information that can lead to definitive answers about the poem's illusive history. The more we come to know of the text's relationship with time, the more we will understand the text itself as readers.

I believe the best modern example of why intangible paratexts are crucial to shaping a reader's experience is to read *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski. The entirety of the novel is unconventional, written to make readers believe they are reading an academic paper and a personal journal commenting on said paper, both voices are then commented on by the third prevailing character voice: the book's editor. The most interesting part is all of it is fictitious. The academic essay discusses the nuances of a short film in rigorous technical detail—to the point where the reader believes it must be a real film that exists somewhere in the world, but in reality, neither the short film, paper, journal, nor even the creative "editor's" footnotes reflect events that have happened in real life. However, none of that is obvious when reading the novel, which makes horror elements (even the supernatural ones) all the more disconcerting, because the reader cannot distinguish reality from fiction.

In *Beowulf*'s case, we have the same issue where the reader is trying to sift through all the information to separate fact from fiction in a story that's told in a way reminiscent of other more historically believable epics. In the modern day, books are typically clearly defined by their genre (fiction, non-fiction, etc.), but before, the line between history and legend often blurred together, becoming indistinguishable. Perception is everything when reading a book, and the slightest bit of additional background information can completely change a reader's sentiment. If modern readers knew about the treasure mounds and genealogies as earlier audiences might have, would the story have a more historical basis in our eyes?

The audience of today does not interpret *Beowulf* the same as the eleventh century (or even eighteenth century) audience because of the differing cultural and historical experiences. These societies' respective flashpoints have a massive impact on society and culture, typically reflected most poignantly through various forms of art. Whether it be historical, religious, or cultural, these unseen forces affect our collective understanding. The same is true for *Beowulf* and the Nowell Codex. They demonstrate how people use art to come to terms with life changing occurrences, like the themes in the texts of a hostile takeover of a country or assimilating religions. All of these experiences shape our interpretation and all the decisions made with that perception in mind can preserve that interpretation for another person (either in close proximity or across great distances of time and space), just as the decision to combine the texts into the Nowell Codex still managed to impact a scholar's research into this cause and theme a millennium later. Therefore, since interpretation is heavily influenced by the reader's own personal experiences, without looking at the cultural (thoughts on England's newest king), religious (conversion and collision), and historical changes through *Beowulf*'s paratexts, a slew of thematic observations and perceptions would be lost to time amidst the ever-changing eras and

evolving languages, which has added yet another layer of complexity to our interpretations on *Beowulf*.

CHAPTER 3: Trouble with Translating

Introduction

Beowulf has a long and extensive history with translations rivaled only by the substantial corpus of scholarly analysis evaluating those translations. As a consequence of Old English being a dead language, modern readers are forced to rely upon these translations to faithfully represent the original *Beowulf* text, since the average person is not intimately familiar with the complex Old English linguistics. The issue with this arrangement lies with the absolute power the translator has to shape the perception of *Beowulf* for the audience reading their version, making it a critical paratext for influencing how readers of the non-original language understand its contents. As is the concern with all works in translation, how does a translator faithfully represent the original author's intent? Is it even possible? What external factors influences the translator's choice of approach? While it may be impossible to fully answer these questions, certain practices have emerged to cope with the perceived deficiencies of translation.

In order to determine the 'validity' or 'authority' of a translation, one must first determine what factors they are judging a translation by. For example, if the translated work is used for educational purposes, they would most likely look for a very literal translation of a work. Different translators will make a variety of choices depending on what they intend the purpose of translation to be. Understanding the power exerted by the translators or what influenced their choices is one way of counteracting translatory insufficiencies; similar to the previous discussion about how learning more on an author's life can alter interpretation. The principle is the same, the person choosing what words another reads have power over their

perception of the story, whether it be the author, translator, or editor. What they deem as important is emphasized and evident in the choices they make when compiling the text.

One reliable way to assess the accuracy of a translation is to refer to philologic evidence. Philology is the term used to describe the structure, historical development, and relationships between languages—an important concept to keep in mind when crossing the language barrier, especially through time. Languages interact with one another, and each word has its own unique nuances attached to it which can change over time, altering its appropriateness for its usage in translation. Each decision made by a translator will impact the end product of their translation. These decisions range from linguistic choices, interpretive ideas on content, and sometimes, as in the case with *Beowulf*, supplementing pieces of text that are unrecoverable. In the last instance, where the original manuscript is damaged or the text has been lost, the text will ordinarily be supplemented using paleographic evidence, or the study of old handwriting, cultural context, and historical dating of a work.

The last factor that makes *Beowulf* a particularly difficult work to translate, besides its age, being written in a dead language, and the missing pieces of text, is the fact that it is a poem. Poetry is notoriously difficult to translate because it is a form of art where word choice is its expression. Therefore, since the author's words are unlikely to translate the same or even hold the same meaning across languages, translators must decide the best way to capture the essence of the work they are converting. I find that *Beowulf* translators usually fall into one of five categories: direct translation, modern language, original poetics, modern poetic, and hybrid. Of course, the content within the categories can vary in terms of composition and the spotlighted meaning if the dimension of time is also included when analyzing the content of the end result.

In this chapter, I will discuss the role of translation's influence on the audience's interpretation of *Beowulf*. As John Niles explains,

> In reading any writing of *Beowulf*, one should ask, 'Who is translating, and what power is he or she trying to assert over the text?' For power of some kind is always an issue. If there is no such thing as a disinterested record or reading of literature, there is surely no dispassionate translation either, whether the translator's passion is directed more toward the language of contemporary poetry, the Germanic heroic ethos, Christian values, nationalism, pedagogy, antiquarianism, or something as specific as metrics. ("Rewriting *Beowulf*: The Task of Translation" 876)

Knowing the type of power being exercised can help *Beowulf* readers understand how it impacts the way they view the poem.

In order to illuminate these iteration-specific choices, I will discuss the translation decisions made by J. R. R. Tolkien, E. Talbot Donaldson, Seamus Heaney, Roy Liuzza, and Maria Headley, respectively. As it happens, this chronological order additionally organizes the translations as a sort of spectrum, on one end is the archaic, direct translation and the other modern, poetic with all the rest in between. From the research I've conducted, it appears as though the more time has passed, the more translators attempt to capture *Beowulf*'s poetry, too. Initially, scholars were only concerned with preserving the meaning of the words as accurately as possible in English, but over time have come to realize the great loss abandoning verse has upon its meaning. This shift in thinking about the preservation of the text lends itself to the creation of alternative *Beowulf* works, transforming the original poem into something entirely new.

Tolkien and the Basics of Translation

Over time, as translations became more accessible around the world, Translation Theory developed into an academic discipline as a means to address the concerns of the above questions regarding reliability and best practice. Though Translation Theory is mainly concerned with modern language translations, it is still applicable to ancient language translations, which are governed by the same principles. I will use the following information as a backdrop for the discussion of how *Beowulf* translations have the capacity to affect interpretation.

While there is no real scholarly definition for translation theory as a discipline, since by necessity it must be extremely broad, there are certain guiding principles for study that generally cover the aspects of the discipline. Maria Tymoczko covers ten such principles in her article "Translation Theory." The first nine can be condensed to describing the core of translation theory as decisions, made both by the original author and the translator, cultural context through time, and their effects. The tenth principle explains the cause for generality in translation theory, "Translation is a cluster concept. Ideas about translation have varied widely across time, place, culture, and language. It is not possible to specify necessary and sufficient conditions that can be used to identify all instances of translation and that at the same time exclude all non-translations across time and space" (Tymoczko 5).

Due to the unstandardized nature of the discipline, the methodologies applied in translation theory are as wide-ranging as its definition, "Indeed the theoretical framework that has emerged in translation studies indicates that translation pedagogy must be extraordinarily open so as to prepare students for the actual challenges of translating metonymically, responding to context and shifting norms as time and culture themselves change" (Tymoczko 6). There will always be an opportunity to create new translations because languages are continuously changing

as time goes on. Therefore, there is no way to appropriately define translation theory without inadvertently excluding certain translations from the definition, similar to the issue that has plagued English students for centuries: defining literature. Logically, since translations cannot exist without their source literature, and defining literature, or developing a set of standards for what counts as literature, seems to be an impossible task, seeing as translations add even more variation, the task of pinpointing what does or does not count as a "real" translation feels impossible. As such, I will not attempt to define these issues clearly either—no matter how I choose to define it will leave loopholes.

Given that there can be no indisputable definition, the best scholars can do is identify the different types of translations as they come to exist, rather than outline what they can and cannot be. Typically, translation types for *Beowulf* can be categorized a few different ways: direct translation, modern language, original poetics, modern poetic, and hybrid. Translations can also be categorized by the date translated, since that will have an impact on how the translator translates text. While those are the most common ways to identify translations, depending on what the categorizer deems most important, there are innumerable possible categories. For example, in *Translation and "*Beowulf" *in translation*, Ellery McClintock explicates on a number of highly specific categories for *Beowulf* translations, such as 'close' alliterative poetry, coffee-table editions, editions of the seventies, editions of the eighties, and editions of the nineties and 2000s. Notice the emphasis on the time aspect of the categorization in this instance, in addition to the two categories that seem unconnected to the strictly time-defined ones by focusing more so on the content rather than the date as the defining characteristic of the version.

Since, at any given time, there is such a wide variety of different types of translations to choose from, when choosing what version to read, the reader must first decide what form of

Beowulf will best suit their needs, and they must also trust that the translator faithfully represented the original text. Usually, scholars refer to philologic considerations when determining the validity of any given choice in translation, though each case is distinct. It is the best way to assess whether the translation is "faithful" since philology is the study of language relationships and the way they evolve over time. Cross-referencing philologic knowledge with the words on the vellum are an effective means to producing a probable translation ("On Argumentation in Old English Philology, with Particular Reference to the Editing and Dating of 'Beowulf'" 1-26). In other words, it becomes more likely that the translation is in closer proximity to capturing the "true meaning" of the written words or authorial intent, creating an experience comparable to what Old English speakers would have interpreting the work through reading.

Philologically speaking, Tolkien is the closest translation to accurately reflecting the language of Beowulf. His version, categorized as the most archaic and direct translation, as well as the oldest that will be discussed, was written in 1926, but was not published until 2014 posthumously by his son. With the other translations, I am able to reference the introductions written by the translators themselves to garner insight into what choices they made and why, however, in Tolkien's case, the introduction was written by his son, but it summarily explains key points in the substantive footnotes scattered throughout the pages of the translation left behind by Tolkien. This composition is made up of three parts, designated by the younger Tolkien as B(i), B(ii), and C, each with unique characteristics to indicate its origin, but generally sharing certain features. Interestingly enough, while Tolkien's translation is by far the most archaic, in the very beginning, he tried to preserve the poem's alliteration before eventually forsaking it entirely, favoring hinting to rhythm rather than representing it. This rhythmic prose

quality of his translation is evident throughout the poem, seen through his usage of -éd when in need of another syllable, although this could also double as reflecting archaisms. Specifically, the younger Tolkien references, "'renowned' 753, 833, but 'renownéd' 649, 704, or 'prized' 1712, but 'prizéd' 1721, and similarly often elsewhere…Verbal endings -s and archaic -eth can be seen for varying rhythmical reasons…" (Tolkien 14). It was Tolkien's belief that to appropriately convey the ornate language of *Beowulf* in English, one must employ more archaic words, which would be in closer proximity to their original counterparts anyway. I could not find any commentary on the transference (or even acknowledgement) of the caesura from the original poem, so I am left to assume it was all together excluded.

However, despite Tolkien's edition perhaps being the closest proximity wise to the original *Beowulf* in this discussion, the emphasis of the time aspect of philology as it relates to the evolution of language is a critical component to consider for clarity and ethical concerns. As languages change, certain metaphors could be misinterpreted offensively (word choice or phrases take on new meanings as time passes and may no longer be appropriate) or have lost historical context that could completely change the reading. In that sense, there is a dimension of ethicality translators must consider as they make their decisions in the translating process, "Similarly these theoretical principles indicate that ethical questions are central to the task of the translator and the role of translation in cultures. The choices that translators must make in adjudicating linguistic and cultural differences, the construction of meanings in target texts, the metonymic relationships between source and target texts, the nature of rewriting, and the ideological aspects of translation all indicate that there is a powerful ethical aspect to translation. Translators are important shapers of cultures, both source cultures through their representations and target cultures as well" (Tymoczko 6). Readers rely on these translations to bridge the gap between

their own culture and the primary culture in the text, which, if done without care, can paint the source culture in a negative light, significantly influencing the reader's perception of both the culture and text in a damaging way. Effectively, translators are the gatekeepers of perception for that language. Therefore, while Tolkien's outdated use of language may be technically the most accurate, however, since languages continuously change and the meanings of words with them, his translation becomes an unreliable representative of the source text to the modern audience. This introduces the danger of misrepresenting the characters, culture, and events actually depicted by *Beowulf*.

Donaldson, Thematic Power in Translation, and the Beginnings of Rebirth

In *From Curiosity to Canon: Nineteenth-Century Translations of "Beowulf,"* Pauline Alama lays out the wide array of influences on Modern English translations and their effects on perception of *Beowulf* over time,

> The earliest Modern English translators of *Beowulf*, Turner, Conybeare, and Kemble, harnessed the poem to nineteenth-century concepts of nation, race, and empire, foreign to the Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Danish society which produced the manuscript. Throughout the nineteenth century, British translators also brought modern ideas of constitutional law and democracy to the poem, leading Kemble to emphasize legal concerns, Arnold and Earle to find constitutional principles, and Morris to make a free and equal "folk" out of the stratified society depicted in the poem. Translators' varying views on women's roles may account for the changing portraits of female characters in *Beowulf*, sometimes assertive and authoritative, sometimes passive and ornamental. (377-378)

As the world around these translators was changing, that history can be seen in their choice to emphasize, embellish, or invent certain ideas within their version of the text. The pattern of changing taste and relevant historical events affecting the translator's decisions through translation biases continues to be seen through time,

> In the Victorian era, folklore became fashionable, and both figures of folklore—ghosts, goblins, elves, sprites—and the process of oral transmission were prominent in the translations of Wackerbarth, Arnold, Earle, and Morris, as well as their American counterparts Garnett, Hall, and Tinker. In the case of Wackerbarth, folkloric images determined his use of the ballad form, popularized by Bishop Percy and Sir Walter Scott. Another facet of popular medievalism—the image of chivalry, which had been so romanticized as to lose all class connotations—spiced the translations of Wackerbarth, Arnold, Earle, and Hall. Popular conceptions of folklore and chivalry were often linked to the need for heroic tales for young people; this concern surfaced directly in Hall's and Tinker's translations though their over-abundant use of the word 'hero'. (378)

Thus, translators should also keep in mind their own relativistic biases when transmitting a work. Since translators have by necessity been given so much power to influence the text, their responsibility is to acknowledge what influenced their choices—the subtleties that guided their decision-making process—which most translators do in their introductions. They defend the choices they make, providing evidence to support their conclusions, just any student would if they had to write an English paper making an argument about their unique interpretation of a text or what they believe to be the deeper meaning. The translators are, in essence, trying to achieve the same thing.

In 1966, Donaldson's translation of *Beowulf* was published on the heels of the heroic translation craze which was instigated after Hall and Tinker's translations, and he made the first steps towards departing from complex, archaic Modern English usage to convey the poem. Donaldson not only points out the heroic fad specifically as it relates to *Beowulf* translations, but also states that he has forgone the heroic style in his version. By balancing the elaborate (heroic-preferred) expression against the simpler phrases in the poem (as he observed from the original text), Donaldson exchanges the language difficulty for what he claims to be a better representative of the actual language expression forms demonstrated in *Beowulf*. To demonstrate this translator issue, he provides an example from the fight between Grendel's mother and *Beowulf*, "At this point the poet says, 'Ofsaet þa þone selegyst': 'Then she sat upon the hall-guest.' This is a reasonable action, for she is much bigger than he, and is preparing to stab him. Yet if one is using a consistently heroic style, the simple verb 'sat'—especially in juxtaposition with the seemingly 'epic' epithet 'hall-guest'—will simply not do" (Donaldson xiii). Therefore, Donaldson favors pairing the epic-sounding phrases with the simpler pieces on the page because in his words, 'sat' is reasonable and getting rid of 'hall-guest' forfeits its grim humor. Although, he acknowledges, "An honest translator must confess that while he has tried to avoid the defects of his predecessors, he has probably introduced defects of which they were free" (Donaldson xiii). Here he recognizes his shortcomings in translating weapons and armor monotonously (unlike the poet) but lauding his refusal to over complicate the sentences just for the sake of doing so, offering no clear solution to find the ideal translation. Other characteristics of his translation include the use of 'lo' for 'hwæt', Latinate forms sparingly used when no sufficient alternative for the Old English word could be found, and repetition of certain words depicting weapons and armor (as opposed to the poet's expansive vocabulary list and synonyms for such

equipment, which was much more emphasized in the original). Like Tolkien, Donaldson did not attempt to reflect the poetical devices of *Beowulf*.

In the modern day, very few people can read Old English, and even fewer understand its nuances, forcing the dependence on translators. While not everyone has the technical Old English linguistic knowledge that R. D. Fulk does, being conscientious of word choice and its affects are a key point of the translation process. For Donaldson, that exemplified itself as his refusal to obfuscate what he read in *Beowulf*, but the answer for what choice to make is not always clear. In cases of questionable linguistics, Fulk reminds translators to rely on the most probable occurrence, rather than forcing ideas based on syntax and poetic form alone ("Some Lexical Problems in the Interpretation and Textual Criticism of 'Beowulf' (Verses 414a, 845b, 986a, 1320a, 1375a)" 144-145). Even if inadvertent, linguistic nuances and relativism can significantly alter a person's interpretation of the text (relativism here referring to both the effect of time and schools of thought on how a work is translated—for example, the period of strong heroic influence on translation). As described in the introduction using a quote from John Niles, some kind of power is always being exerted on the text. However, he continues on to state how this type of influence is not necessarily a bad practice—this type of ever-changing interpretive power is what continues to sustain the story of *Beowulf* through the ages:

> I see no reason to lament the publication of new translations of *Beowulf*, for as long as the poem is being rewritten by translators who are also strong poets in their own right, the process of misprision or 'strong misreading' that is the driving force in literary tradition, in terms of Harold Bloom (84-105), is at work. Even when the poem is rendered into modern language with only the most respectful literalist decorum, then someone, somewhere, is wanting to raise *Beowulf* from the dead and set it into motion again before

> a new generation of readers. The poem, in short, is becoming news again. Some witnesses to this resurrection may even be inspired to learn Old English well enough to throw translations away. Whenever this happens, not only *Beowulf* but a panoply of other texts gain a new lease on life, and the cultural heritage of the human race is correspondingly enriched. ("Rewriting 'Beowulf': The Task of Translation" 876)

In this way, new translations enable the text to be reborn into cultural relevancy with every iteration, whether the words remain faithful to the original document or not, the fresh interpretations are what keeps the legend alive. This allows the new generations of readers to foster connections with the work and characters since the new translation would presumably speak in terms more familiar to the reader and topical issues facing the new generation. Even today, there are numerous translators that seek to transform *Beowulf* with their own interpretations, such as Maria Headley, who not only transformed the language of the text, but also updated the conflicts to apply to concerns of those who live in the late 2010s and early 2020s. Therefore, we can see the beginning of translators shifting to favor reimagining the text over preserving each original word, pushing their preferred thematic undertones through their word choice, during this period after Tolkien. However, representing the poetry of *Beowulf* had not yet become a major concern for the translators.

Heaney and the Poetry Problem

Arguably, the most difficult type of text for translators to convert are poems. *Beowulf*, in particular, is especially challenging due to the archaisms exhibited in the poem, since *Beowulf* is

a unique remnant of Old English poetic practices that have been virtually lost to time. As Niles describes,

> The problems faced by readers who approach *Beowulf* in translation are made more acute by the special nature of its verse. The poem is composed in an artful language that was set apart from ordinary speech even during the Anglo-Saxon period. This language within the language had its own diction, syntax, rhythm, and style distinct from the norms of prose. Thanks to the accidents of manuscript transmission, *Beowulf* happens to be unique in its sustained display of the resources of the Old English art of heroic poetry. Even more than the language of other Old English poetry that has come down to us, the ornate language of *Beowulf* renders translations inadequate ("Rewriting Beowulf: The Task of Translation" 858).

This is where the different categories of *Beowulf* translations come in—in order to try to capture the 'ornate' expressions in the manuscript. Oftentimes, translators make a conscious decision beforehand whether they want to uphold academic or artistic validity for the poem, although there are some ambitious ones who aim for both. Typically, when a poem is translated, the translator has to 'sacrifice' certain aspects of original so that they can capture a different piece of the poem. The most common example of this is translators abandoning the poetic motifs in favor of a more direct translation (as seen with Tolkien and Donaldson).

Using that underlying dichotomy, Jeanette Jacobsen assigns Arnold and Donaldson's translations as literal, Wackerbarth and Lehmann as poetic, and Garnett and Heaney as both in her article "A Lexical and Syntactical Analysis of Translations of Beowulf," which aligns with my placement of both Heaney and Donaldson's translations in this thesis. She goes on to argue

that though Heaney's translation takes several creative liberties, he creates a new art in order to capture the old, lost art from the original language. In this case, attempting to capture the artistry of the poem by supplementing or choosing not to strictly rely on the words within the manuscript.

As expressed by Jacobsen, Heaney's translation in 1999 dips more into the poetics, and instead of relying wholly on Modern English, he slips in a bit of his Irish heritage as well. The first thing I noted from his translation introduction was the fact that both Heaney and Donaldson treated synonyms for weapons and armor with monotony—abstaining from obscure word choice is a characteristic of his version. Additionally, he is the first of the examples to directly attempt to preserve the alliteration where possible throughout the entire poem. Furthermore, drawing from his Irish influences, he preserved the cadence in the poem, "And when I came to ask myself how I wanted *Beowulf* to sound in my version, I realized I wanted it to be speakable by one of those relatives. I therefore tried to frame the famous opening lines in cadences that would have suited their voices, but that still echoed with the sound and sense of the Anglo-Saxon" (Heaney xxvii). Similarly, where "a local Ulster word seemed poetically or historically right" Heaney used Irish-adopted Old English words like in line 3026 where he used "hoked" in place of "rooted about" as he felt it reflected the sound of the poem more accurately with the voice and cadence he had in mind while translating. Heaney cushioned the loss of accurate archaic language by relying on his Irishness (heavily-influenced-by-Old English). He took pieces of culture emanating from the same source as the original to serve as a middle ground, simultaneously reintroducing the lost poetry aspects, bridging the old and new.

Regardless of what the translator chooses, though, whether poetical or technical accuracy, there will be compromise, "The reason for such pugnacity of course is that there is no possibility

of a universally agreed ideal poetic translation, just as there can be no perfectly achieved equivalence of the original in a modern version" (Birkett and March-Lyons 215). By necessity, no translation will be a faultless representative of the original work. Any change to the flow of the poetry can result in a change of meaning, and since we are not entirely aware of the nuances of what this archaic type of Old English poetry is supposed to look like, it is impossible for us to fully understand the original artistry. However, what is clear beyond a doubt is that the poem is art.

Liuzza and Scholarly Revisions in the Pursuit of a Correct Translation

Liuzza's first edition translation of *Beowulf* was published in 1999, but since I was unable to discern the differences between the first and second edition (published in 2012), for clarity, I will be referencing the second edition version. If I had to review it, I would say this: it was easy to read (I finished it in one sitting), but I didn't even realize I was reading a poem at all. Liuzza did his best to incorporate the poetic aspect, but instead of focusing solely on the alliteration and caesura, he said, "I have tried to write in a poetic idiom that is analogous to, not imitative of, the character of the original; the end result has been a translation that is somewhat quieter than most others. Each verse has four stresses, a medial pause, and alliteration…" (Liuzza 43). It is just as he says, this version felt the most quiet and academic, despite the fact that Liuzza deliberately arranged every line with the poetic devices in mind. Perhaps I am ill-equipped to spot poetry, since though I noticed the occasional alliteration, all other devices were lost to me as a reader. On the other hand, maybe this is a case that more modern poetic devices are the only way a modern reader can obtain a sense of the original. On account of this, I would categorize his translation as "original poetics," meaning he preserved the original forms of poetry

as seen in Old English (the alliteration, caesura, and medial pause for the half lines in every verse).

One particular quirk of his introduction is his consistent referral to editors of *Beowulf* instead of translators. Even though editorial influence is not often acknowledged by scholarly analyses on translation, it can have far reaching impact on the translated text. While ordinarily not labeled as editing, translators often find themselves editing bits of the source text for one reason or another, performing the role of editor as well as translator as they make their decisions on the best way to represent the prime text. The choices they make will affect the perception of the readers of the contents of that work—the same power of the translator, which is what I believe Liuzza is indicating in his introduction. Using lines 126-129 from *Beowulf* as an example, Liuzza explains,

> In Old English, the correlative þa is used twice; most editors of the Old English text put a semicolon between the two clauses, so that each is read as an independent clause—'Then …Grendel's warfare was made known to men; then lamentation was lifted up….' This is an entirely plausible reading, and when consistently followed up (as it generally is in editions of *Beowulf*) it gives the poem a solid, somewhat squat style, sturdy and stationary like handmade stone wall. Instead I have translated the first 'when' and the second 'then,' an equally plausible reading that emphasizes the poem's moments of movement and forward momentum, its qualities of logical sequence, subordination, and syntactical complexity. (43)

The seemingly minor editorial choice made by Liuzza from 'then' to 'when' exemplifies the power each chosen word has to influence the reader's reading experience—and judging by the

volume of academic articles critiquing their peers' translations, other scholars have the same opinion as to the importance of intention and influence of perception that Liuzza does behind each chosen word. Even doing a cursory search for translatory edits in *Beowulf* will reveal an astounding amount of debate and criticism ranging from supplementation of missing text all the way down to ten-paged analyses on the diction for singular Old English word in the poem. Revisions on translations from other scholarly translators are the most prolific type of editing criticism for *Beowulf*. As a result, the *Beowulf* manuscript has gone through three types of editing before it gets to the reader, scribal editing (as discussed earlier), translator editing, and usually an external editor's editing (could be another scholar or publisher-associated editor).

The most infamous cases of external editing stem from the issue of translating the first and last lines of *Beowulf*—it is the scholars' collective desire to ensure that the poem's introduction (first impression) and conclusion (which tends to stick with the reader significantly more than the preceding lines) are as accurate and engaging as possible. The unique level of stress on the first word of the poem makes it a challenge to appropriately represent in Modern English, since the options at our disposal are to translate it as an interrogative, a regular adjective, or an exclamatory—all three of which fail to capture the intermediate, slightly more than normal, stress linked to the Old English word 'Hwæt' at the beginning of the poem. This makes it a challenge for a translator to choose what word to introduce the poem with—since there is no accurate equivalent in Modern English (Sayers 2018). Even among the translators I have referenced, each chose a different word; Tolkien chose "lo," Donaldson "yes," Heaney "so," Liuzza "listen," and Headley "bro."

As for the last lines of the poem, the funeral rite of *Beowulf*, in "The Last Line of Beowulf" Bammesberger states his case for the emendation of the usual translation from

perceivably deriding Beowulf's character with the adjective of "most eager to gain fame [for himself]" to pairing the adjective with a different noun, one that would make more sense continuity-wise, to become "he [Beowulf] was most lenient to and eager to gain fame for his people" (463-465). However, while either translation of the last lines can syntactically work, Bammesberger's argument for the edit is dependent upon the perception that Beowulf being eager to gain fame is a negative descriptor (which would not line up with the other characterizations throughout the poem), but that may be an interpretive bias to associate the adjective as a negative characterization—when the story was written in Old English it may have been a praiseworthy attribute. The choices made by the translator are often influenced by their own perception, which can cause them to make editorial decisions to the text that push particular themes more than others. This is the typical case of contested scholarly readings nitpicking every little detail for each *Beowulf* version, attempting to come to a more accurate consensus on translation.

However, since everyone has their own opinion on how things should or should not be translated, the question becomes what is the best way to check for accuracy. One method for effectively editing *Beowulf* translations, according to Fulk's "Some Contested Readings in the 'Beowulf' Manuscript," is to study the physical manuscript as a reference for decision making—where he uses his own encounters with the manuscript to dispute certain older interpretations on the text. Due to modern technology, places in the text that were previously blank or lost are revealed, eliminating some of the guess work regarding their content. Additionally, scans of the original document enable more people to see *Beowulf* and translate it for themselves, as was the case for Headley, whose translation would not have been possible without such scans, according to her translation introduction.

Unfortunately though, it is not always possible to edit the content of the text using this type of paleographic evidence, and in its absence, non-paleographic questions, such as style and narrative function, can assist in determining content. The ambiguity in the original text forces translators and editors to rely on more than just what is on the page, which is how the wide variety of interpretations are born (Tripp 157). Each translator can interpret the non-paleographic evidence in a different way, thus creating their own editions of *Beowulf*. Moreover, each scholar's depth of understanding of Old English varies, resulting in even more variation and the spurring on of scholarly criticism. Whoever they may be, the editor must be familiar with lexical nuances of the source text in order to effectively perform their role. Otherwise, perfunctory assumptions will further alter the interpretation of the text, as Fulk explains,

> Rather, the point is that our understanding of the text is in countless places predicated on particular lexical assumptions, and that scholars are all too often unaware of how well- or ill-founded some of those lexical assumptions are. Textual criticism is also dependent on lexicology. The other chief criteria, besides the lexical, for determining whether the text is in need of emendation—syntax, alliteration, and meter—are all quantifiable. In regard to lexical matters, however, textual decisions must be based on a subjective understanding of relative probabilities in terms of etymology, semantics, and usage. This requires considerable linguistic knowledge. It is not surprising, then, that it is in the area of lexical choices that recent textual criticism of *Beowulf* has been feeblest, the editors even of some major editions allowing such antecedently improbable manuscript readings as *deninga* (465), *wudu* (581), and *scotenum* (1026) to stand unamended. ("Some Lexical Problems in the Interpretation and Textual Criticism of Beowulf (Verses 414a, 845b, 986a, 1320a, 1375a)" 145-146)

Even with the 'considerable linguistic knowledge' Fulk describes, since each scholar will interpret the base text differently, there will be many differences of opinion as to the proper way to translate each verse, line, and word. For people without intimate knowledge of or access to the source text, at best they can make tentative comments only after having compared several different versions and translations of the source text (Kreiner 2009). That said, it seems that the ideal place to receive edits for a *Beowulf* translation is allowing other scholars of both *Beowulf* and Old English in general to review and suggest changes to the translation—exactly the type of scholarly criticism I described as the most prolific surrounding the text as it stands currently. I believe that by having several different people, with varying experiences or expertise, review a translation, not only will the translator be able see what the consensus is on certain issues, but they will also be enlightened to distinctive interpretations of the words (or a whole new construction) they would not have been able to perceive without the assistance of these people. While this would be extremely time consuming, that is the best method publishers can use to properly, or accurately, edit any work in translation.

Headley and the Modern *Beowulf*

Though I have no first-hand knowledge of Old English poetical translation issues, I am reminded of my years studying Latin when I think about the differences between translating prose and poetry. For four years, I was taught how to translate Latin into English, but my final semester taught us ways to translate Latin poetry—what kinds of poetry were most common, identifying the ways they changed or used words, etc. Our final project required a few parts: a direct translation of one of Catullus's poems, a poetic version of that poem, and an artwork we

created to represent the contents of the poem. Despite myself being proficient in direct translations, the addition of creativity gave me pause. I asked myself 'how was I going to represent his poetry?' In the end, I decided to first write my complete direct translation so that I ensured full understanding of what was happening in the poem and the types of words and imagery Catullus implemented. Next, I considered the poetic devices he used in its original form, noting the use of syllables and the number in each line, since the manipulation of syllables is a common motif in Latin poetry. The final step was combining the information from both the direct translation and what could not be translated from the original by carefully constructing each line and choosing each word with intention. Now I only had to do this for a few lines, and it took me several days of thinking to develop my finished product, I cannot imagine the time it would take to do the same for the whole of *Beowulf*.

To that end, it almost seems logical to abandon artistry in favor of a more direct understanding so that at the very least, its historical worth is persevered. Today, we uphold that unfortunate tendency to treat *Beowulf* as a purely historical artifact, rather than acknowledging its literary merit as well (Alama 379). It is a delicate balance of appreciating both the literary and historical significance of the text—each has its own intrinsic value and reveals fascinating information about the text as well as *Beowulf*'s origins (and we all know how desperate scholars are to determine its origins). Perhaps when all this information is considered in tandem, a new version of *Beowulf* will be born, continuing its cycle of perpetual rebirth. For now, though, the modern versions of *Beowulf* lean more into the artistry of the poem (compared with the likes of Tolkien and Donaldson), going so far as to revamp the original forms of poetry in the text into poetical forms that modern readers can recognize and appreciate.

As far as metamorphic, artistic versions of *Beowulf* go, Headley's 2020 *Beowulf* is the most recent and transformative translation out of all the examples discussed. Headley approached *Beowulf* from the perspective of someone who appreciated the value of the characters so much so that she learned Old English to develop her own understanding of the poem. Albeit, because she is not an Old English scholar, it calls into question the accuracy of her translation in representing the poem, making it more difficult to use for academic study. On the other hand, though it may not be viable for academic scrutiny, it does accomplish its purpose of reengaging a modern audience with the *Beowulf* text, bringing *Beowulf* into today's society and making it accessible to readers to whom the text may have been unable to reach otherwise if packaged in other forms.

As a fiction author, Headley is particularly equipped to fashion a creative literary edition of *Beowulf*, which is precisely what she does. It is because of her background that she explicitly recognizes the influences on her translation throughout her introduction and clearly describes how they impacted her. She explains how she knew Grendel's mother before Beowulf and how that influenced her opinions on the character and consequently her translation of Grendel's mother as a warrior woman instead of a monster—pointing out that despite the analogous descriptions of Beowulf and Grendel's mother, Beowulf is warrior and Grendel's mother is the monster. Continuing on, she explains how her baby son grappling with language and her learning to communicate with him through context clues helped her think about translation in the same terms. She uses modern language in no uncertain terms, transforming the infamous opening 'hwaet' as 'bro,' sprinkling in swear words, and constructing familiar phrases, like "got down to it" in line 3155, that would largely be frowned upon in more academic settings.

Having only read part of her translation, I could see the poetic devices—even the caesura felt prominent (though this could be bias since this time I knew what to look for). Headley implements devices such as couplets, rhyme, and alliteration across line breaks, which would certainly not be included in Old English poetry, but to Modern English speakers, the poetry is all of a sudden evident, flowing, and expressive. While she did not have any specific voice in mind speaking the verses, as Heaney did, she references a fabricated mental vision for the narrator, "I come from the land of cowboy poets, and while theirs is not the style I used for this translation, I did spend a lot of time imagining the narrator as an old-timer at the end of the bar, periodically pounding his glass and demanding another. *I saw it with my own eyes*" (Headley xvi). There can be no doubt, Headley's translation of *Beowulf* is both unique and transformative; she edited and departed from the sanctity of the original to create a comparable *Beowulf* for modern audiences, utilizing her own perceptions of the poem to inform the way it was translated, thus making the text relevant once more.

Conclusion: Transformation (Towards a new audience?)

At what point does a translation diverge enough from the original text to become a new one all together? It is almost impossible to discern the point at which the change takes place—to decide how much creative liberty a translator has in their work. As I have mentioned several times now, the issue with reading works in translation is that there will never be a translation that perfectly captures exactly what the author wrote in their own language and scholars will never be able to agree which version deserves the most authority or is the best representative. Afterall, to translate is to interpret, making translation itself a paratext for the reader's own interpretation, since it fundamental alters (and has authority over) the way readers perceive the text.

In order to compensate for the content lost on account of translation, the translator often must add to the text in some form to bridge the gap, "Therefore, it is difficult, if not impossible, to convey the original poetics and meaning of the original manuscript without adding something to the poem in order to transfer its complex story into modern times" (Jacobsen 5). This, considered with what is perhaps my favorite quote that I found in my research, puts into perspective the essence of all translations, "Each language has its own properties, and the translator must become a dealer in equivalences rather than exactitudes" (Hudson 2). For whatever reason, the imagery of a dealer of equivalences resonated in my mind throughout writing this whole chapter. It reminds me of the bartering system, exchanging completely different items for one another to satisfy both parties because, despite the items being different, their subjective value to each person can be the same. In economic terms, the marginal utility is maximized. While we will not have the same experience reading *Beowulf* as someone from the eighth, eleventh, or eighteenth century would, we can still derive enjoyment from whatever version of *Beowulf* we choose.

Keeping the necessity of equivalences in mind, every translation will transform the text in one way or another just as another published version would. As Tymoczko oulines,

> Translation is a form of rewriting and as such has many commonalities with other forms of rewriting including versions of texts adapted to specific media (such as film), versions adapted to specific audiences (such as children), editions, anthologies of texts, literary and textual histories, critical studies of texts, and so forth. Investigating the commonalities that translations share with rewritings illuminates both the processes and products of translation, and vice versa. (Tymoczko 4)

Therefore, since the reader can think of all translations as legitimized versions of the text (versions count as paratexts, therefore different translations do, too), it follows that every version provides a unique perspective on the text that when considered together to produce a broader, more comprehensive understanding of the text as a whole, akin to the experience of an individual reading alternate versions of a text they love so that they can see a new side of the story, or even relive the experience of reading it for the first time.

Instead of trying to recreate *Beowulf* in its purest form (a form that would be completely lost on the people of today), we can capture its core, "My purpose here is not to call for some utopian ideal of fidelity, but rather to celebrate and evaluate the artistry that translators have brought to the task of rendering a powerful work of the literary imagination into terms that, far different from the original poet's, may still be compelling for readers in our own time" ("Rewriting Beowulf: The Task of Translation" 859). There is no one continuity for how the story should be translated—language doesn't work like that—instead by reading many different versions, the artistry and perception of each provides a stronger grasp of the original poet's intent by not limiting ourself to a single interpretation of the words. After reading Headley's translation introduction, I was surprised to see the degree of similarity, echoing the same sentiment, "It's both pleasurable and desirable to read more than one translation of this poem, because when it comes to translating *Beowulf*, there is no sacred clarity. What the translated text says is a matter of study, interpretation, and poetic leaps of faith. Every translator translated this poem differently. That's part of its glory" (Headley xv).

That is why English students discuss various individual or personal interpretations for famous literary works, so that they can cover all the potentialities of the authorial intent. If we analyze opposing perspectives for works written in English to better understand the work, why

do we not apply this principle to Old English studies as well? Instead of trying to develop one canon 'correct' translation, students should be encouraged to broaden their understanding of the text by comparing differing, maybe even contradictory, translations. Time also plays a critical role in the interpretive relevancy of a text in conjunction with translation.

Using Burton Raffel's translation, Hugh Magennis comments on the phenomena of revitalizing old works like *Beowulf* by taking such a unique approach, "For Raffel, this kind of radical approach, which he would refer to later as the 'interpretive approach,' is what defines a poetic translation. Rather than being tied too closely to the original the translator of a poem like *Beowulf* must keep the bigger picture in mind: 'The translator of medieval verse is transmitting an entire culture, a dead worldview, with all its dead customs and turns of phrase—cast in molds of dead verse form and verse movement.' In doing so, the translator must be bold, and boldness is certainly one of the key qualities of Raffel's translation" (Magennis 111). In order to reflect what the experience of reading *Beowulf* was like when it was first written, modern poets must not only reintroduce the story, but also reincarnate *Beowulf* with modern influences in mind. It is only natural for the historical moment to influence textual perception, as it did at *Beowulf*'s inception, it does too with each iteration.

When *Beowulf* is updated in this manner, it becomes accessible to a new generation of people who might have felt ostracized due to unrelatability otherwise. One modern (and infamous) example of how updating a text generates a new audience is seen in Headley's transformative translation of *Beowulf*. Instead of remaining faithful to the words used in the original poem, Headley wholly transform the poem for the modern day (using modern slang words), enabling it to become more comprehensible while additionally emphasizing ideas relevant to contemporary issues and debates on violence and war. While having such

inaccuracies (like slang) illegitimates it for academic study, it simultaneously facilitates a broader audience's consumption of an otherwise difficult story to digest without the proper resources (Olesieiko 714). Thus, her interpretation exposes the story to new people, consequently perpetuating the cycle of the continuous emergence of new perspectives and interpretations on *Beowulf*.

EPILOGUE

From the creation of the text to its combination with the Nowell Codex, then the Southwick Codex, surviving the 1731 repository fire, and finally to the form it remains in today at the British Museum, cut apart and pasted into frames, the story of the *Beowulf* manuscript echoes a similar theme to one featured in its contents: change. Despite all the challenges that have faced the manuscript throughout its history, it survived, though not without change. Its physical form has changed in addition to the way people translate and present the text to readers.

The transformation of *Beowulf* does not end with new types of translations, however. It also covers the adaptations and works directly inspired by the text in both new and old forms of media. Before writing her translation of *Beowulf*, Headley first wrote *The Mere Wife* as a contemporary retelling of the ancient poem. It was a work guided by her love of Grendel's mother to reinvent the original story for the modern day—echoing her goals for her translation. Similarly, while Tolkien borrowed bits from several medieval stories in writing the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (*Beowulf* being the main inspiration for various themes and characters), the clearest instance of his *Beowulf* inspiration is found toward the end of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. A thief steals a cup from a dragon's cave full of treasure while it is sleeping and the dragon proceeds to burn down the nearby town as recompense, which is the exact same sequence of events as *Beowulf*'s ending. Another famous reimagining of *Beowulf* is John Gardner's 1971 *Grendel*, depicting the events of *Beowulf* through Grendel's eyes and turning his character into an antihero.

There is no shortage of non-book adaptations and re-imaginings either. From the Met's *Beowulf* rock opera to *Beowulf*: The Graphic Novel, the legend of *Beowulf* has been interpreted by today's generations in a variety of creative ways. Albeit, some works, like the 2000 *Beowulf* movie, diverge from the source material far more than others. I found that rendition to be more reminiscent of a Medieval European *Blade* movie than resembling *Beowulf*. It also introduced several scenes unsuitable for younger audiences and completely cut the second half of the poem about the dragon and Beowulf's death. Whereas the 2000 movie was more reimagining than representing *Beowulf*, the 2007 *Beowulf* animated movie was much closer in content to the original, but still diverged in some respects as it was converted from poem to movie in order to fit better with the new medium (in other words, connecting to the new audience in terms that they are more familiar with). The film added prominent romance plotlines and tied them into a theme of shame or sullied honor to make it fit better with the themes of honor normally emphasized in heroic epics, thus giving the audience more of what they expect (romance), but not entirely betraying the source material by forcing it in a way that does not mesh into the original narrative (like the 2000 movie did). Each new "author" chooses how they wish to interpret the source material and present it in a way that they believe will best engage their new audience. The way they engage with an audience will also be reflective of the time period that produced it, just as the original *Beowulf* was.

The point is that the only thing that matters is how the people consuming a work choose to interpret it. They are the ones to give it meaning. Referring back to Barthes' "The Death of the Author," he wraps up his discussion by saying,

> …yet there is someone who understands each word in its duplicity, and understands further, one might say, the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him: this

> someone is precisely the reader (or here the spectator). In this way is revealed the whole being of writing: a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted. (Barthes 6)

The fact that *Beowulf* has no identifiable author is a non-issue. The various backgrounds of the reader ultimately dictate interpretation: what field of study they specialize in, the times in which they lived, where they are from. My goal with this thesis was to present a segment of the array, demonstrating that all avenues were not yet exhausted. Sometimes, as scholars, it is easy to become entrenched in our own concentrated area of research so much so that we fail to see how that piece fits in conjunction with discoveries across disciplines (such as linguistics, manuscript studies, archeology, history, sociocultural, and translation). While there are collections of essays that accomplish this (each individual essay within a discipline put together into a book, like a composite manuscript), I have been unable to find an academic paper that brings all these different elements together in conversation with one another, so I wanted to do so here. It makes it easier, especially for someone new to *Beowulf* discourses, to see the pros and cons of current theories, as well as how much is still unknown to us. This compiled body will hopefully inspire

some future scholars, who may have otherwise been intimidated by the overwhelming amount of scholarship that comes with *Beowulf*, that they can find a space to contribute to this agglomeration, too.

My choice to read *Beowulf* before finding paratexts to prove my own interpretations allowed me to be open minded as I carefully considered what each scholar had to say. I cannot read Old English, nor am I an expert in linguistics or history, so I had to rely on the authority of their interpretations based on the evidence presented to guide my own. However, even experts within disciplines often disagree on how to interpret certain things, which can be quite a challenge to maneuver, even more so for a non-expert. Without having a taken Medieval Manuscript course, I would have been complete at a loss when faced with the technical terms used by these scholars. This makes the scholarship almost inaccessible to anyone without this type of niche knowledge, and I hope this thesis can serve as an introduction of sorts, laying out this information in a more digestible manner, so as to encourage further involvement as opposed to intimidation.

Beowulf's history is long and complex, having existed for a millennium, so it is logical for there to be a staggering amount of analysis on the poem—to put it in perspective, it was all ready old by the time Columbus landed in the Americas in 1492. The margins on the text could have been written centuries apart from one another—written by people living in entirely different age up until it was finally locked away from the public in an effort preserve the integrity of the manuscript. Every person who handled the text had their own opinions and opportunity to influence it. With every new change to the manuscript, *Beowulf* became a revised edition—a paratext created by those with authority over the text that modifies the way it is presented to the reader. Whether a physical or intangible alteration, each affects interpretation and the way we see

the text. The sole source we have to judge the original *Beowulf* story by is this manuscript, any other version that may have been created (or simply not altered in the same way) has been lost or destroyed over time, so we cannot compare differences. On account of that fact, to understand the paratexts is to understand those authoritative choices that have power to change our perception of *Beowulf*'s contents, deepening both our comprehension of the text and its creation. Therefore, the only *Beowulf* we know is this post-modified manuscript that has been interpreted and re-interpreted, only for modern readers to interpret it again in their own way. Today, while we can no longer alter the physical manuscript, we can expression our thoughts through academic analyses, creative translations, new media adaptations, and transformative creations inspired by the well-worn text.

At each stage of its life from inception (whenever that may be) to adaptation, *Beowulf* has been continuously supplemented and interpreted by each and every person who has come into contact with the material. The manuscript makers, scribes, editors, owners, historical figures, and translators have each left a unique mark on the text through its lifetime, producing a one-of-a-kind text in every sense of the word. As a result, even if we did know the author of *Beowulf*, who he was and the purpose he created the poem for, there would still be unexplained questions about its contents (if it was meant to record history, why does it sound so farfetched? If it was commissioned by Cnut in the eleventh century, why was it written in archaic Old English?). That is why scholars must keep exploring new options with *Beowulf* and encourage modern adaptations that can draw new generations into the discussion. Maybe one day down the line, as times continue to change, a new interpretation will be formed that knits all these facts together.

In the end, the author's creation is only a combination of parchment and ink; it's not what the author has made, but rather, what the reader chooses to make of it. In fact, the absence of an

author is what enables the reader to flourish, “the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author” (Barthes 6). Since there is no defined “Author” for *Beowulf*, the reader is empowered to make the text their own, superseding what would be the explicit author-dictated terms and deciding for themselves its value through their interpretation.

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