Old English Verse in Modern Translation: Beowulf by Seamus Heaney, J. R. R. Tolkien and F. B. Gummere

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Abstract

Beowulf is lauded as the greatest piece of Old English poetry, and not without reason. However, the English language has changed so much over the course of the last millennium that the original version is all but illegible to the speaker of Modern English. The answer to this problem is translation, but it can be argued that even now, in the 21st century, we still do not have a widely accepted "best" translation of Beowulf into Modern English. The goal of this paper is to examine three translations of Beowulf; Gummere's, Tolkien's and Heaney's on the basis of their choice of vocabulary, the morphology of the kennings used, the translation of proper nouns, repetition, formulaic language, alliteration, the voice and the tone of the poem as realised by the aforementioned factors and other facets of the translations. These will be compared to each other and to the original poem to determine how consistently the translations portray the heroic culture of the early Germanic peoples but also, more importantly, how well they reflect the intricacies of the construction of the Old English alliterative verse. Through the analysis of these features of *Beowulf* and its translations, problems in translating Old English poetry will surface, and these will be discussed in an attempt to conclude how best to approach the translation of *Beowulf* into Modern English.

Keywords: *Beowulf*, Old English poetry, heroic elegy, alliterative verse, formulaic language, kenning, literary translation

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this work is to analyse three translations of *Beowulf* and the degree to which they remain faithful to the facets of Old English poetry. The paper will start by discussing the historical framework surrounding the poem and its inception. This will include examining the history of the English people, the structure of their society, the common Germanic cultural features prevalent in the English society at its beginnings, while also showing how the aforementioned elements manifest themselves in *Beowulf*. The paper will continue by briefly discussing the history of the English language itself; what was it like at its beginnings and how it has changed over time. This will spawn a discussion on the nature of Old English poetry in general, with a particular focus on those features thereof most relevant for *Beowulf*, such as kennings, formulaic language, repetition, foreshadowing, the structure of the alliterative verse, the syntax, and the tone of the poem itself. In addition, a brief historical overview of the development of the English language will be presented in those areas deemed important for literary translation and for presenting the differences in comprehension of texts and poetry between the Anglo-Saxon reader or listener and the Modern English audience. This will show some of the challenges the modern poet faces when translating Old English poetry into Modern English. To further explore this point, and to serve as the main bulk of this paper, three Modern English translations of *Beowulf* will be analysed in terms of vocabulary use, proper noun translation and modernisation, use of kennings, structure of each translation's attempt at re-creating the alliterative verse scheme, repetition and formulaic language, syntactic structure of the verse, organisation and sub-division of the poem, and the voice and the tone of the translation. The three translations will be compared amongst themselves, but reference will also be made to the original poem in Old English where it is necessary or where a particularly salient poetic image compels us to. Following the interpretation, the comparison of the three translations will reveal how faithful to the original poem each of them is, how well it carries over the central properties of Old English poetry into Modern English, and how well it would resonate with the modern reader. The concluding thoughts presented in this paper will deal with future implications of the ever growing number of *Beowulf* translations and if and why they are still needed.

1 THE ANGLO-SAXONS

1.1 Over the whale-path they came

Firstly, an introduction concerning the early history of the Anglo-Saxons is in order to set the stage and see the background behind the interaction between various actors in *Beowulf* as well as the social organisation and political movements of the various peoples mentioned therein. Germanic presence in the British Isles is attested before the fifth century, but Bede mentions that the main wave of Germanic tribes came to Britain in the fifth century after the British king Vortigern invited them to help the Britons fight off the marauding Picts and Scots (Miller). In turn, Vortigern would grant them land and pay them tribute if they were successful in warding off the raiders. Bede reports that the "invincible army" that came to Britain consisted of the "three strongest races of Germany, namely, Saxons, Angles, and Jutes" (Miller 25), however it is very likely that Frisians and perhaps some Swedes also joined the invading tribes, though much fewer in numbers, as Wormald pointed out. (Godden and Lapidge 2)

Bede then writes; "Of Jutish origin are the men of Kent, and of Wihtsoetan; that is the tribe dwelling in the Isle of Wight. From the Saxons, that is from the people called Old Saxons, came the East Saxons, the South Saxons, and the West Saxons; and from Angle came the East Angles and the Middle Angles, Mercians, and the whole race of the Northumbrians. This is the land which is named Angulus, between the Jutes and Saxony, and it is said to have lain waste, from the time they left it, up to this day. (8^{th} century)." (Miller 25) The early settlement of the Germanic tribes mostly corresponds to the territory of today's England, and many place-names, counties, shires, and substituents of England derive their name from these groups.

Bede also writes that the first two commanders were Hengest and Horsa, "the sons of Wihtgils, whose father was called Witta, whose father was Wihta, and the father of Wihta was called Woden" (Miller 25). Woden is the Anglo-Saxon equivalent to the Old Norse god Odin, and is featured in many genealogies. Bede states "from his race the royal families of many tribes derived their origin" (Miller 25). Taking a step back, even Hengest and Horsa are interpreted as semi-mythical figures. This is important to note because even the Christian Bede respects, willingly or forcibly, the importance of genealogy of the heathen tribes arriving in Britain, though their world-view was much at odds with Christian teachings. Royal genealogies will be further explored in the chapter on religion, though it is important to point out the often mythic point of departure for genealogies. This creates one of the links

connecting the later Christian Anglo-Saxon scholars with the earlier heathen heritage of their pagan ancestors, still respected though warped and modified in connotation during later times. The genealogies were important as a means of legitimising power and reinforcing national myths. They were often warped not only by the Christian scholars for the purposes of twisting the heathen heritage, but they were also changed to accommodate alliterative patterns and thus become easier to memorise, a practise stemming from oral tradition (Rowsell 3).

After successfully warding off the Picts for a time, the Germanic tribes turned on their hosts and confederates. At first, they demanded greater rations and pay, only to declare open hostility on their hosts afterwards. In the battles that followed, the Britons were pushed back westward into the territory of today's Wales, Cornwall, and across the sea to Brittany on the European mainland. There were attempts by the Britons to retake their ancestral land but these all proved futile. The Germanic tribes would go on to found kingdoms after driving out the native Britons. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms are known under their collective name "Heptarchy". The Heptarchy consisted of Wessex (West Saxons), Sussex (South Saxons), Essex (East Saxons), Kent (Jutes), East Anglia (East Angles), Mercia (Middle Angles, Mercia literally means "borderland"), and Northumbria (North Angles, literally means "north of Humber"), though this was not a unified kingdom until well into the 10th century. The exact movement and development of the political situation thereafter is not our primary concern here, but it is important to note how the English history began. Specifically, the origins of the English peoples in the Germanic Iron-age European mainland, the well-documented warrior culture of the invading Anglo-Saxons, and their way of life marked by conflict and struggle are to be noted as they provide the context and setting of *Beowulf*. These will be dealt with in more detail in further chapters of this paper as appropriate and relevant, especially as regards the common Germanic mythic cultural heritage.

1.2 The earls and the churls – the Anglo-Saxon society

The Anglo-Saxon social organisation is of great interest because of its importance in *Beowulf* both from the notional and the linguistic point of view. The basic social structure of the invading Anglo-Saxons was centred on the *cynn*[1], a group consisting mostly of people related by blood, led by a *cyning.*[2] The relationship between the warrior of the *cyn* and the *cyning* was based on mutual respect and benevolence was implied. The king would reward the warrior with treasure and sometimes even land for achieving victory and valour in battle. The king would protect his subjects, and his subjects would in turn serve him.

The king was the supreme lord of a group of blood-bound peoples. Looking beyond the kin and the king, there are many other terms with which the Anglo-Saxon social structure can be described, which are important to consider when dealing with Anglo-Saxon poetry. They are at the same time often relegated to historical use or their meaning has changed significantly since the Anglo-Saxon times. Sometimes, it is difficult to ascribe one singular meaning to the word due to its wide application. Therefore, we cannot simply choose one Modern English equivalent to describe it. These terms are of great concern since they are used by poets in a variety of ways that sometimes go beyond or even against their common or administrative usage, and for various reasons. This naturally spills over into translations of Old English texts and poetry, and sometimes creates confusion or misunderstanding, or gives the wrong impression, but this topic will be discussed in further detail on the examples of various solutions for noble titles the translators have provided.

One of the lowest ranks in the Anglo-Saxon society is a churl (OE *ceorl*). When translating writs from the Anglo-Saxon period or just talking about the period in general, we might translate the Old English *ceorl* as "churl", but the meaning of the word has shifted so much that it would not be an accurate representation of what the Old English word implied. Churl is nowadays similar in meaning to "yokel", an uneducated man, usually from the countryside, lacking manners, and of crude behaviour. While this was indeed one of the meanings of the word *ceorl*, the word also meant "husband", more commonly still it stood for "free peasant", but was even used to refer to lower class nobles, especially in poetry. [3] The most pervasive properties of all these meanings are that they referred to some kind of

[1] Modern English "kin"
[2] Modern English "king"
[3] The Bossworth-Toller Old English dictionary lists the following meanings for the word *ceorl*; "a freeman of the lowest class", "churl", "countryman", "husband". It also lists three Latin glosses for the word: *homo liber, rusticus, colonus*

freemen, who were usually farmers of lower or rarely middle social status. They enjoyed some freedom, but in times of war they were to be enslaved should their superior fall in battle. There were worse fates than being enslaved after combat though, as the warrior nobility were killed if they were bested in combat.

While a great percentage of people were farmers during Anglo-Saxon times, the cult of the warrior nobles is well established in poetry. People from this class are often referred to as *thegns*, stemming from the Old English word with the same spelling, sometimes modernised to "thanes", but also translated as "servant", "retainer" and alike, despite them being nobles. These were landed or appointed nobility under the service of an *eorl*, or *ealdormann*, both of which stood for an ealdorman. The ealdormen were a class of higher nobles. Stenton writes that; "in all the recorded fighting of Anglo-Saxon history the typical warrior is the man of noble birth, fitted to be the king's companion, with far more than the equipment of an ordinary peasant, and dismounting only for battle" (John 20). Thanes were consolidated into armies or hosts called a *fyrd*. Poetry often celebrates the warrior ethos, the bravery and unrelenting determination in the face of certain doom. "These poems were so often devised for the entertainment or edification of fighting men. They show an utter indifference to agricultural pursuits and preserve a complete silence on the subject of fighting *ceorls*" (John 24).

While the warrior culture pervaded much of Anglo-Saxon poetry, the warriors owed their allegiance to ealdormen, who in turn answered to the king. The ealdorman had a sphere of authority called a *scir*, from which the Modern English word "shire" derives. The ealdorman was a higher nobleman who would pass control of the shire onto their progeny upon their death. However, the *scir* is also primarily the *fyrd*, sometimes even called the *folc*. "It is apparent that these all mean the same thing" (John 28). But though they mean the same thing, they are used in different ways to fit various needs of the poets. One poet might consider one word to be particularly important for building the alliterative scheme, while another might select a different word to better accommodate the syllable count in the verse line. One could argue that these were not in fact the one and the same thing because multiple words were used. There likely was at least some nuance in meaning between such terms, but more on the language of the Anglo-Saxon in the next chapter.

The pyramid of social classes in Anglo-Saxon England is based on vassal bonds amongst groups, and the bonds are defined as lordship. The concept of lordship pervades the entire Anglo-Saxon society; ealdormen may call the king their *hlaford*, but the warrior thanes also call their ealdorman *hlaford*. The poem *Beowulf* itself demonstrates the social hierarchy

well. Beowulf has a *fyrd* of warrior thanes who answer to him. Among these thanes, we learn specifically of Wiglaf, who scolds the rest of the *fyrd* because they did not take up arms and help their lord in his fight against the dragon. Wiglaf mentions how it was futile of Beowulf to have given them weapons if they were not going to use them to defend their *freodryhtne*[4]. "The poem in general takes it for granted that warriors fight as the men of their lord, that the greatest lords are the king's *gesiths*, and that they too are tied to their king by the bonds of vassalage" (John 25). All these terms have specific references and indicate a particular bond between them. Though they are often interchangeable, poets may assume the same to be true of Modern English words for nobility and misuse them, creating false connotations and historically inaccurate denomination. This point will be explored in the analysis of the three *Beowulf* translations.

The implied bond between the thanes and their lord is even stronger than the bond of kinship, as demonstrated in the story of Cynewulf and Cyneheard, as reported in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The Battle of Maldon* poem shows this as well. "The whole point of the poem implies that the duty of a man to his lord animated the *fyrd*: those who fell with their lord are held up to honour, those who fled from him, to obloquy" (John 27).

1.3 From heathens to holy men - religion of the Anglo-Saxons

The Germanic tribes that invaded Britain in the fifth century C.E. were heathens. They did not believe in the Christian God, and neither were they aware of his existence nor of the Christian teachings. They were merely acquainted with the existence of Christianity and its churches, which were a prime target for plundering. Unfortunately, not much is known about the religious practise of the early Anglo-Saxons due to a lack of primary written sources from the period when they adhered to their heathen faith. The Anglo-Saxons only adopted a wider form of literacy with the conversion to Christianity, so most of the information about the Anglo-Saxon religion we have comes either from foreign sources or from later times.

It is difficult to argue for an "officially recognised" and consolidated religious practice among the Anglo-Saxons. We cannot even say for certain if there were priests of any kind. The Anglo-Saxons did have healers and wise women, who specialised in cures and rites, but it is difficult to ascertain whether there was a class of people we could call "priests". John D. Niles in *Pagan survivals and popular belief* (Godden and Lapidge 128) reports that the

[4] Another way to express *hlaford*¸ "lord".

Roman missionaries needed to establish a *wergild* for priests upon arriving to Britain because the Anglo-Saxons did not determine a *wergild* for that class of people. (Godden and Lapidge 126)[5] This can mean either of the two things: there were no heathen equivalents to the Christian priests, or, if there were, those people were not liable to *wergild*, which would have been out of place since *wergild* was one of the primary mechanisms of stopping endless blood-feuds.

What we can tell with certainty is that the Anglo-Saxons observed important holidays tied to the agricultural year. Many of these names will be familiar even to the Modern English speaker and some traditions are still alive today. Take, for example, the midwinter festival of Yule, or the celebration of the arrival of spring at Easter, which, though nowadays a Christian holiday, has roots in the pagan celebrations of the goddess *Eostre*. The month of the celebration of Easter, April, was called *Eostrumonaþ*. The *hearfest,* from which the Modern English word for harvest stems, was used to refer to autumn. November was called the *Blotmonaþ*. *Blot* is an Old English word that means "sacrifice", and is also found in cognate languages, such as Old Norse. The *Blotmonaþ* custom was to kill all cattle except that which was to be fed over the winter. Another important figure is Nerthus, who is presumed to be the female consort of the Old Norse *Njorðr*. She was associated with the holy grove and was likened to the concept of the *terra mater*. She is also presumably the mother of *Freyr* and *Freya*.

Much of the remaining evidence of religious worship concerns worship centred around the agricultural year, which meant the veneration of cult figures rather than chief gods of a pantheon. That, however, does not exclude their existence or their veneration on the part of the Anglo-Saxons. In fact, we need not look much further than the Modern English language to find traces of Germanic gods. The days of the week in Modern English still bear the names of some Anglo-Saxon gods: Tuesday was at first *Tiwesdæg, Tiw* being equivalent to the Old Norse *Tyr,* a god associated with justice, and is also presumed to have occupied the chief position of the sky-father in the pantheon, the *deus-pater*, later usurped by *Oðinn*. Speaking of *Oðinn*, Wednesday, or *Wodnesdæg* was dedicated to him, or rather to his Anglo-Saxon cognate, *Woden*. *Þunorsdæg* was dedicated to *Þunor*, the Anglo-Saxon *Þorr*, the reckless god of thunder, and Friday, or *Frigdæg* was devoted to *Frig*, *Freyr* for the Norse and god associated with prosperity and fertility.

[5] John D. Niles - Pagan Survivals and Popular Belief

Woden is a very important figure for the Anglo-Saxons, as was mentioned before. He is the Anglo-Saxon parallel to *Oðinn*, who, "As well as being the Lord of the gods, is god of war, poetry, frenzy and is depicted as a father to gods and men, referred to as *Alföðr* (all-father). If Oðinn has some basic similarities to the Anglo-Saxon Woden then the most valuable information about the god that can be taken from the Eddic verses, in regards to royal genealogies, is that he was a king" (Rowsell). In addition, we recall Bede's statement that Woden was the god "from whose stock the royal race of many provinces deduce their origin", which is in line with his interpretation as the *Alföðr* (all-father). His role in the royal genealogies cannot be understated as he provided the stability upon which to base the legitimacy of a ruler's power. In addition, Hermann Moisl contends that common descent from Woden might have been used by Northumbrian rulers to "express political relationships with other provincial royal houses in the seventh century" (Moisl).

This suggests that Woden had had a long tradition of worship and that he was readily recognisable to the Anglo-Saxons, even after the Christianisation. The Angles and Jutes placed Woden somewhere in their royal genealogies, often making him the progenitor of their dynasties. Initially the Saxons claimed descent from *Seaxneat,* who is a rather obscure figure, but may be related to the aforementioned *Tiw*. The word *Seaxneat* may have birthed the term *seax*, or vice versa.[6] Genealogy played an important role in the Anglo-Saxon society, which is reflected in *Beowulf*. In the poem, a person is referred to by name, often accompanied by at least a patronym. Important characters have more profound genealogies going back in time at varying lengths. The mythical origin of the genealogies is also significant for *Beowulf*, because there are dynasties with mythical figures as their progenitors. The prime example of such a genealogy is the founding myth of the Danish dynasty of the Shieldings, which goes back to Shield Sheafson. The mythic link is to be found in the *Abingdon Chronicle*, which describes a ritual the purpose of which was to determine the rights of the monks of Abingdon Monastery to a certain piece of land. To perform the ritual the monks took a round shield and placed a sheaf of corn upon it. They placed a candle of considerable size upon the sheaf, lit it, and let the shield float in the water, which would show them the land to which the Abington monks had rights (Orchad 102). The fact that a sheaf is used and that it floats in water is rather evocative of the account of Sheaf, the father of Shield, who is referenced at the onset of *Beowulf*. Sheaf arrives over the ocean without any possessions but manages to thrive in the land of the Danes and makes them prosperous too, which is a trace of a fertility or prosperity

[6] A *seax* is a bladed weapon, with the length of a short sword, with only one side of its blade sharpened.

ritual observed by the Anglo-Saxons and other Germanic tribes. Genealogies in *Beowulf* often do not reflect real history, as the poet uses them to his own ends; to draw parallels, as a way of foreboding future events, etc. But we have no reason to believe that the genealogies of the Anglo-Saxons were always reflective of the real situation either. Indeed, the genealogies are ordered into alliterative patterns rather than according to chronological order, "which is most likely a means of facilitating an oral tradition that can easily be remembered" (Rowsell 3). In general, Anglo-Saxons' naming conventions included alliteration on the initial consonants of the parents and their progeny's names. Alternatively, the names of the progeny would contain at least one element (morpheme) of their parents' names. Furthermore, claiming divine or royal descent by manipulating genealogies was prevalent, and the restructuring of genealogies happened even for seemingly benign reasons (Rowsell 5).

What was once a pagan religious belief was turned into a weapon of politics. Niles (Godden and Lapidge) reports that the same was done by monks in the attempt at converting the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. Pagan practises were repurposed into Christian rites. Grave goods left by the Anglo-Saxons for the dead would become graveside offerings for the Church. Wells were considered not only practical but also sacred by the heathen Anglo-Saxons, and were dedicated to the Virgin Mary by the Christian priests. Pope Gregory proposed the conversion of pagan shrines into Churches. Even cattle sacrifice was allowed but could only be performed in honour of the martyrs. Finally, *Þunor*'s hammer pendants were taken as a concept and replaced by cruciform amulets. (Godden and Lapidge 130) Gods were repurposed for genealogical roles, they were demoted from their divine status and euhemerised.

This is not to say that Christianity merely fed off of heathen practices. Christianity introduced many new concepts into the Anglo-Saxon society, and its influence on the linguistic level is seen even before the Anglo-Saxons invaded Britain. Take, for instance "church", which is a loan from the greek *kuriakon*, and was borrowed before the Anglo-Saxons were even Christianised. The greatest bulk of Christian terms did not enter the language until after the conversion (Jespersen 40-41).

However, the conversion to Christianity was not as neat as the primary sources would lead us to believe. The outreach of the Roman Empire was much weaker in the British Isles. The peoples thereon were not as constrained by the Latin civilisation as were those on the continent. "Barbarian culture on the Continent was suffocated by the civilisation it tried to

emulate. In Britain, it had room to breathe." (Godden and Lapidge 4)[7]. Christianisation was carried out in two missions. The first was by Pope Gregory's disciple Augustine, which failed. The second one was conducted by the Iona missionaries, invited by Oswald of Northumbria, which lead to the foundation of the bishopric of Lindisfarne. Ireland was already Christianised at the time so Christian influence came from both Rome and Ireland. The Roman and the Irish churchmen disagreed on how to calculate the date for Easter, and the Anglo-Saxons eventually accepted the Roman date calculation, which was the starting point for the greater influence of Rome on the Christians in Britain. But Rome and Ireland were not the only ones to influence Christianity in Britain; Frankish Gaul played a key role in the conversion of East Anglia and Wessex, which were among the most productive (if not the most productive) literary and religious cultural centres. (Godden and Lapidge 5) Overall, the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons was not as straightforward of a process as Bede may have implied. The process was much more dynamic and shaded and the pagan heritage lasted well beyond the time when Christianity was officially adopted. Over time, the Anglo-Saxons did settle on Christianity, though some pagan practises were not entirely abolished. "It took a long time thoroughly to assimilate the new doctrine, and, in fact, much of the old heathendom survives to this day in the shape of numerous supersititons" (Jespersen 40). We can see this clearly in *Beowulf*, where the heathen past is reinterpreted through the lens of a Christian writer. The past is not explicitly derided but is scrutinised from the Christian point of view. One other lasting effect that the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon pagans to Christianity had was the introduction of writing, which developed greatly in the following years.

1.4 Common Germanic heritage of the Anglo-Saxons

The Anglo-Saxons are a Germanic group of peoples. They originated in the mainland of Europe and started migrating to Britain in the fifth century C.E. When they came to Britain they brought with them their cultural and historical heritage, much of which is shared among other Germanic peoples of the time. Indeed, comparative studies show us that the Germanic tribes around the time of the Iron-age in northern Europe had much in common.

"Germanic legend matters to us because it was somehow important to the Anglo-Saxons, who tried harder and harder with each passing century to establish a Germanic identity; and because an acquaintance with the stories enables us to follow what is going on in five Old English poems. Germanic legend holds our interest because it is extraordinary, a

[7] Patrick Wormald – *Anglo-Saxon society and its literature*

strange and enchanting offspring of the real and the dreamworld, of Clio and Morpheus." (Godden and Lapidge 88)[8] This can be seen on numerous levels in the society, but in this work and in this chapter we shall focus on the literature that shows traces of Germanic culture and heritage.

Though Anglo-Saxon references to Germanic legends are scarce, the sources outside England are even scarcer. Of the Anglo-Saxon sources the following make references to Germanic legends: *The Finnsburgh Fragment*, *Waldere*, *Beowulf*, *Widsith*, and *Deor*. Outside England, we have the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, the Latin *Waltharius* and some 500 lines of poetry in Old Norse. Not much material to draw from, but the abundance of sources in Old English is striking. An influence of the Anglo-Saxon writings on later sources in other Germanic languages can potentially be inferred. For example, Richard North argued that the genealogical role of *Oðinn* in pre-Christian Scandinavia was the result of influence from Woden's role in Anglo-Saxon England. (Rowsell 1)

"Germanic heroes were equally as prominent in genealogies as euhemerised gods, so were presumably as useful for these purposes. The genealogies include the names of heroes such as *Sceaf, Scyld, Beaw, Heremod, Eormanric, Offa* of Angle, *Finn* and *Hwala*; the first seven of whom appear in *Beowulf* and the last four in *Widsith*."[9] The genealogies tell us of a distant and imaginary past, somewhere between history and faerie tale, which is reflected in the genealogies in *Beowulf* as well. The mythic nature of the genealogies has already been explored in the previous chapter on the example of *Woden*.

The legendary stories provided later poets and writers with a lot of material, be it the structural organisation of poems, the literary devices that potentially have roots in the oral traditions, or in the form of the subject matter discussed. The legendary material reached the Anglo-Saxons in the form of songs, or *lays*[10]. These were performed by *scops* or gleemen, oral performance-based travelling poets who kept the cultural heritage in circulation. They would sing songs of glory to celebrate a great deed of a warrior or at feasts to entertain the attendees. Interestingly, none of the singers in the five aforementioned Old English poems is an Angle, a Saxon, a Jute, or a Frisian, which further enhances the notion of temporal and spatial distance of the singer and the poem (but not the poet) from the audience.

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[8] Roberta Frank – *Germanic legend in Old English literature*

[9] Patrick Wormald, "Bede, *Beowulf*, and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy," in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England: Papers in Honour of the 1300th Anniversary of the Birth of Bede, Given at Cornell University in 1973 and 1974, British Archaeological Reports no. 46,* Robert T.Farell (ed), (London, 1978), pp. 56-57, as cited in *Woden and his Roles in Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogy*

[10] Short songs of narrative nature.

The focus in Germanic legends was on the king, his retainers, and their exploits. The pursuit of glory is one of the main concerns of the warrior nobles and the attainment of glory is one of the central heroic themes in poetry where the warrior nobility play the main role, the prime example of which is Beowulf. Through glory, the warrior achieves immortality, as their name and deeds will be testament to their deeds in life beyond the grave. Though uplifting, such a pursuit, alongside almost reckless determination in the face of adversity, also implies a tragic and futile earthly existence, a lesson often repeated in poetry with Christian overtones. For the heathen Anglo-Saxons, glory was about the best thing they could achieve to guarantee a lasting effect on the world, as they were more concerned with their earthly existence. For the Christians, the salvation lies in the afterlife, in Heaven, so they derided such vain pursuits of their heathen forebears. Curiously, in *Beowulf* the yearning for glory is still celebrated to an extent, though the poet admits the pagan Geats, Danes, and Swedes were misled and unaware of the mere existence of the Christian God, let alone of the Christian teachings.

They did cherish the memories and the stories of the Germanic heroes. One of the most famous such heroes is the legendary smith Wayland. He is depicted on numerous artefacts, such as the Franks Casket and the Northern English and Gotlandic stones. Weland is referred to in many written works, such as in *Beowulf*, where he is said to have crafted the hero's armour, in *Deor*, and in *Waldere*. Even Ælfræd the Great pondered over this mythical figure, though he was a devout Christian.

However, despite them keeping the stories of past heroes alive, the Anglo-Saxons cannot be said to have fostered a feeling of belonging to a broader Germanic group of peoples. While they did sense some kind of kinship as they viewed legends of one group of Germanic peoples as common to all, we cannot speak of a common Germanic identity until the establishment of the Frankish Empire of Charlemagne.[11] (Godden and Lapidge 95) The inclusion of both Frankish and Scandinavian material in Old English poems is more than likely encyclopaedic rather than indicative of a pan-Germanism from the fourth to the sixth century C.E.[12] (Godden and Lapidge 95)

Still, the big point of interest here is that in *Widsith, Beowulf, and Deor*, knowledge of the Germanic legend is a given for both the poet and his audience. The material is used in an allusive, referential way, not just thematically. This means that the pleasure of recognition, of

[11] Frank, Roberta *Germanic Legend in Old English Literature*, in the *Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*
[12] Ibid., 95

sharing in an erudite game seems to have been important to the Anglo-Saxons[13] (Godden and Lapidge 97), and presented one of the joys of poetry. The "plot holes", the unexplained circumstances or unclarified time spans were used by the poets to invent new narratives. These narratives had a familiar framework into which they were inserted. Therefore, while the audience may not have been familiar with the narrative that the poet put forward, they were familiar with at least some of the framework surrounding it, and this seems to have been intentionally constructed. Beowulf is one such example of an invented character inserted with some historical basis into historical circumstances and driven to perform feats of valour to fill the void between actual historical events which are referenced in the poem. One other feature of such "embedded" writing was that legends were not explicitly elaborated. "Explicitness was not a virtue of Germanic legend, reticence was," as Frank notes. (Godden and Lapidge 102) This is problematic for translation as the Modern English speakers cannot as easily relate to the legends of old without further study. Therefore, translation is simply not enough to fully grasp the greatness of Old English poetry. We shall consider how best to approach such translation in the analysis of the three *Beowulf* translations in later chapters.

[13] Frank, Roberta *Germanic Legend in Old English Literature*, in the *Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*

2 THE ENGLISH TONGUE AND BOOKCRAFT

2.1 The *Staff-craft* and the growth of English

The English language belongs to the West Germanic subgroup of Indo-European languages, though its typically Germanic features have diminished under the influence of other languages. "The existence of English as a separate idiom began when the Germanic tribes had occupied all the lowlands of Great Britain and when accordingly the invasions from the continent were discontinued, so that the settlers in their new homes were cut off from that steady intercourse with their continental relations which always is an imperative condition of linguistic unity." (Jespersen 18) Unfortunately, we do not have any written records from this time, but comparative philology can paint a picture of what the language might have looked like at the time. We are more concerned with the literary language that developed later, which admittedly was based on the common tongue, but no elaborate writings in Old English appear before the seventh century C.E.

The Old English common tongue still had markedly Germanic features. Old English borrowed words from other languages but with less intensity than was characteristic for Middle and Modern English. Old English used common tongue words to denote foreign concepts, thereby expanding the original word's meaning, a process also known as semantic borrowing. Moreover, compounding was a much more prolific word-building process than it is in Modern English. Compounds were sometimes words pieced together from English equivalents of the morphemes that foreign words were made up of. Examples of such calquing include: *god-spell* (gospel), from the greek *euaggelion*, and *hæðen* ("heathen"), which is according to a theory derived from *hæþ* ("heath"), in close imitation of Latin *paganus* from *pagus*, "country district." (Jespersen 44) "But in most cases we have no such literal rendering of a foreign term, but excellent words devised exactly as if the framers of them had never heard of any foreign expression for the same conception – as, perhaps, indeed, in some instances they had not." (Jespersen 44) For instance, a patriarch was called *heahfæder*, "high-father", the three Magi were called *tungol-witegan*, from *tungol* "star", and *witega* "wise man". Religion was not the only domain with such creative solutions to new concepts. There are records of words such as *læce-cræft* "leech-craft", for medicine, *efn-niht* for "equinox", or *sun-stede* for solstice, and even *stæf-cræft* (literally staff[14]-craft) for

[14] "Staves" was another term for the arrangement of runes in mysticism. Runes were sometimes compounded into complex shapes which supposedly enhanced their magical properties.

"grammar". There is a plethora of compounds created in this manner, many of them listed by Jespersen in his *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, a list is way too long to include here. Most such words were replaced by Latin or Greek derived equivalents in Modern English, but the important thing to note is how creative and productive the Old English language word-building was. Building upon the base of existing words which blended into the language and obeyed native grammatical and phonetic laws ensured that even the commoners could readily recognise or at least try to grasp at the meaning of the word, though it may have been unfamiliar in that form to them. The same word-building process drives the creation of kennings and compounds in general in poetry. This may pose a problem for translators as the nature of the English language changed to an extent. Compounding is no longer as prevalent, and English has lately preferred to simply borrow the terms which could not be expressed by the current stock of vocabulary. For this reason, poetic compounds are often seen as no-man's-language and are not accepted with ease. The language of *Beowulf* was not seen as natural even for the time of its writing, but such compounds are not completely out of place in the poem, and are, in fact quite natural for common tongue word-building. Not only was this natural, but necessary, according to King Alfred. The populace in Anglo-Saxon England did not know much, if any Latin for Latin and Greeks borrowings to take hold. This encouraged, nay, mandated the use of popular words as much as possible (Jespersen 46).[15]

Personal names were often compounds as well, put together from morphemes whose meaning vanished over time. That is, they were no longer recognised as productive and meaningful in the common usage, though they often retained their meaning in poetry. The names of close relatives, such as those of parents and their children, tended to alliterate or include one element of either of the parent's names. The alliteration would provide the link between close relatives, filling the void created by the lack of surnames. This is also why *Beowulf* and *Hrothgar* have no surnames. They are however, referred to by their patronym quite often. Patronyms, along with other bynames, such as profession, place of origin, or even prominent physical features are the sources for future surnames. See for example *Æþelræd Unræd*, (Athelread, the Ill-advised), *Eadbeorht Eadgaring* (Eadbeorht, son of Edgar), *Eadward se langa* (Eadward, the tall). One challenge we shall explore in a later chapter is the transfer of Old English names into Modern English, based on examples found in translations of *Beowulf*.

[15] King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care. Preface (Sweet's translation).

Another feature of Old English that is important to understand for its literature is the placement of stress. Much like in other Germanic languages, the stress in Old English was front-heavy. This means that stress was usually put towards the beginning of the word. As Indo-European languages in general tend to have stronger suffixes than prefixes, this led to stress appearing on the root morpheme of the word. If not, then it would appear at the morpheme which was most significant and salient to the speaker, but these would often collide. Jespersen calls this "value stressing" which refers to stressing "that part of the word which is of greatest value to the speaker and which therefore he especially wants the hearer to notice." (Jespersen 26) The beginning stress is important for consideration in the alliterative scheme of Old English poetry. The *Beowulf* poet, for example, would construct lines in such a way that the line contained two half-lines, both of which contained two stressed syllables and a varying number of unstressed syllables.

2.2 Book-craft, lays and songs of the English

Another testament to the prolific nature of Old English and of its rapid growth is the fact that Old English is the only vernacular of early Medieval Europe to have developed a literary standard by the tenth century. The standard was based on late West Saxon, and the standard variety was even taught by the School of Æþelwold, bishop of Winchester. (Godden and Lapidge 46)[16] One of the causes of such developments was the influence of the Archbishop Theodore. He was Greek, and "the Eastern Church approved the use of vernaculars more than the aggressively Latin West"[17] (Godden and Lapidge 8)

The language of poetry was mostly the West Saxon dialect, with some Anglian phonological features and words. The West Saxon is one of the only registers of Old English that is clearly identifiable and describable. It has a large stock of distinctly poetic words which were briefly mentioned in the previous chapter. The kind of poetic language in West Saxon can also be found in Old Saxon, Old High German, and Old Norse, which points to a common source thereof in the ancient Germanic poetic tradition. Tolkien summarises the Old English verse structure thus; "Of Old English verse he wrote: 'In essence it is made by taking the half-dozen commonest and most compact phrase-patterns of the ordinary language that have two main elements or stresses. Two of these [phrase-patterns], usually different, are

[16] Gneuss, Helmut – *The Old English Language*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, Godden & Lapidge
[17] Wormald – *Anglo-Saxon Society and its Literature* in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, Godden & Lapidge

balanced against one another to make a full line.'" *(Tolkien, Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 25)

2.2.1 Alliteration as the binding agent of the Anglo-Saxon verse

Alliteration is the most important facet of Old English poetry and is common in other contemporary cognate languages, such as Old Norse. The repetition of initial consonants on either of the first (or, less commonly, on the second) and the third stressed syllable in a line was mandatory, and was what bound the half-lines across the caesura. Optionally, both the first and the second stressed syllables had to alliterate with the third in the second half-line, but at least one of them had to. In addition, [sp], [st], and [sc], could alliterate interchangeably, a principle used by Francis Barton Gummere in his translation, though more on this in a later chapter. Furthermore, the conventions of poetry allowed for the repetition of initial vowels to count for the alliterative scheme instead of consonants. The rule was also more lenient on which vowels can alliterate as it allowed any vowel to alliterate with any other vowel and semivowel (though we note that usually, the initial /w/ alliterates with itself rather than other vowels or semivowels).

The number of stressed syllables was strikingly consistent, while the number of unstressed syllables varied but was also subject to certain principles. In *Beowulf*, for example, the vast majority of the lines contain four stressed syllables and the total length of the line rarely exceeds eight syllables. The first stress of the second half-line was the point of maximum rhetorical significance and the moment of audible resolution of the alliterative scheme (Bradley 6). The stress falls, as we have discussed in the chapter on language, on the semantically important part of the word, while the affixes' value is diminished. This phenomenon eventually led to the reduction of vowels in many unstressed syllables in Modern English. The nature of the Old English language which maximised onset, as did other contemporary Germanic languages, resulted in most lines being trochaic or dactylic. The caesura had various functions; it could serve both as a type of conjunction, binding the two half-lines, or it could perform the function of a full stop (Bradley 6). It also at times signalled a change in metrics, from trochaic or dactylic lines to iambs, for example. Surely, alliteration would play an important role in the mnemonics of songwriting and performing. However, while there is evidence in favour of the oral origin of alliteration, later writings in the Germanic literary tradition cannot be judged solely based on the mnemonic function of alliteration. Alliteration most likely primarily served the aesthetic and structural roles. The

aesthetic role can be explained by drawing a parallel to end rhyme, which was much preferred in Latin and early Romance languages and only later crept its way to the peak of popularity in the English literary tradition. Alliteration and end rhyme serve mostly the same aesthetic role. The structural argument is potentially much more important as it binds the text into metrical units that are more easily reproducible, more pleasant to view and read but also preserve the text integrity. In his *Die Altgermanische Dichtung*, 1941, Heusler "points out that structural relevance is an important difference between alliteration and end rhyme, which is typically decorative." (Chris Golston 17) When we take a look at the *Beowulf* manuscript, we see how the writing conventions at the time were not as structurally organised or intuitively easy to interpret as is the practise in modern times. Instead, the alliterative scheme gives us a clue as to what the lines and the half-lines are and where the caesura lies. Hence, alliteration is of utmost importance in determining the structure and the overall flow of the poem, so breaches of this tendency should be scarce. At minimum, two consecutive lines should not contain this rule-breaking as line structure can be inferred from the neighbouring lines if only one of the several lines does not contain alliteration. This is a key element in Old English poetry, especially in *Beowulf*, and it should be retained in any Modern English translation to preserve the original effect and integrity of the poem. Alliteration never left he English tongue, and has to this day remained one of the favourite stylistic devices. Indeed, Tennyson wrote that "when I spout my lines first, they come out so alliteratively that I have sometimes no end of trouble to get rid of the alliteration." (Jespersen 58) Even common speech is ripe with alliteration and this is perhaps the reason behind Tennyson's statement.

2.2.2 Kennings and other compounds

There is a rather creative and potent vault from which to draw vocabulary for the purposes of poetry. The poetic language in question was characterised by a large number of synonyms or near-synonyms. These were necessary for the requirements of the alliterative verse and have had time to develop over the centuries, especially since a few domains were of key interest to the poets. One such domain was represented by the undertakings of the warrior nobles, as mentioned in a previous chapter. In his *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, Jespersen lists thirty-seven words meaning "hero" or "prince" that can be found in *Beowulf*. (Jespersen 51) The plethora of words for certain ideas or objects is certainly no coincidence; they must have had some difference in meaning even if Modern English speakers cannot tell apart several of the synonymous words from the Old English period. To do so they may need to use an entire phrase. However, sometimes single-word synonyms

were not enough even for the poets, who then resorted to compounding and metaphorical kennings. Compounding was the easy answer to the requirements of the alliterative verse because it was also a productive feature of the common language, which therefore also felt natural, as we explored in the previous chapter. However, this process also created words which were strictly used in poetry. This is evident in poems such as the Battle of Maldon, where "18% of words do not appear in prose." (Godden and Lapidge)[18] Similarly, in *Beowulf* we find kennings which are not used outside of the very poem, let alone outside poetry in general. Also, many words which were previously linguistically productive and commonplace in the English language were relegated to poetic use only. For example, *hild*, meaning battle, is only retained in poetic use and personal names in later Old English. Other examples will be explored in the analysis of the three *Beowulf* translations.

2.2.3 Syntax

Poetry also often featured insertion of parenthetic phrases to place a comment or explanation. In modern versions of Old English poetry, dashes are often put into these places, but "the punctuation in our printed editions is essentially that of the modern editors who may want to impose on their text a grammatical precision that the poet may not have intended."[19]

This made the language of poetry more "slow and leisurely; the verse does not invite us to hurry on rapidly, but to linger deliberately on each line and pause before we go on to the next." (Jespersen 51) The rhythm is further enforced by the alliterative four-stress verse lines, which gives Anglo-Saxon poetry almost a marching rhythm. Repetition is another key facet of Anglo-Saxon poetry. It concerns the subject matter, where the poet tells us the same or similar thing twice or even thrice, and the language employed by the poet, which is characterised by the formulaic expressions we find in poetry. We are not to interpret "formulaic expressions" as whole sentences or phrases repeated verbatim, but rather formulas and patterns for constructing strikingly similar strings of words where phrase elements can be switched with other words of similar alliterative value, prosody, and, if necessary, meaning. This gives the reader more time to ponder over the subject matter and further reinforces the "slow and leisurely" nature thereof. Variation is very taxing on the poet though, and perhaps even more so for the translator.

[18] Gneuss, Helmut – *The Old English Language*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, Godden & Lapidge, pp. 49
[19] Ibid., p. 49

Lastly, both language and poetry in Old English are marked by a much more flexible word order than is usually employed in Modern English. This is more difficult to both read and reproduce in Modern English translations due to the strict word order in Modern English. This is especially the case in poetry since "in natural languages, syntax takes precedence over prosody, but in poetry the prosodic structure is given, into which syntax must fit. In order to make this work, marginal syntactic structures become more frequent." It is therefore perfectly natural for poetry to feature scrambled syntax. This may deter some readers, but is an inherently insignificant issue. The problem lies in the fact that English has changed from a language with freer word order into one with strict word order, which does not lend itself too well to this particular principle of poetry.

Still, "in English, the distance between poetical and prose language was much greater in this first period than it has ever been since." (Jespersen 53), Jespersen argues. However, Geoffrey Russom elaborated four principles of the verse form in *Beowulf* in his *Beowulf and Old Germanic Metre*. The very first principle he set up is that "foot patterns correspond to native word patters", which is why it is important to also consider the nature of the common tongue of the Anglo-Saxons. Moreover, the third principle says that the "assignment of alliteration corresponds to assignment of stress in Germanic compounds and serves to bind smaller metrical units into larger constituents. The integrity of the larger constituent is marked by alliteration on its first subconstituent." (Russom 2) His principles pinpoint the origin of the poetic metrics in the natural flow of the Old English language, shared by other older Germanic languages.

3 *BEOWULF*

3.1 The writer, his hand-writ, and its readers

Having laid out the principal themes and the structure of Old English poetry, it is time to turn to the pinnacle of Anglo-Saxon literature, *Beowulf*. *Beowulf* is the longest poem in the Old English language numbering 3182 lines. The original poem is contained within the Cotton Vitellius manuscript, which survived Henry VII's dissolution of monasteries and the subsequent confiscation of literary works. The manuscript was assembled by Sir Robert Bruce Cotton from at least two quite separate codices. (Orchad 33) The Cotton collection unfortunately caught fire in 1731, but the *Beowulf* manuscript was salvaged relatively undamaged.

The written version preceding the manuscript can be postulated. The poem was likely in circulation among poets of the oral tradition in some form as the written version still contains traces of both style and subject matter typical of oral tradition.

The date of the poem is hard to establish, though we have some markers of early dating; Offa's Mercia, age of Bede, *Rædwald* of East Anglia (whose burial at Sutton Hoo is very similar to *Scyd Scefing*'s funeral described at the beginning of *Beowulf*).

The author of *Beowulf* is unknown but it is most likely the work of a single mind, a Christian re-interpreting the pagan heritage of the Anglo-Saxons through the lens of Christian teachings. The broad narrative of *Beowulf* had served the Anglo-Saxons well in keeping alive their values and traditions, but the surviving poem must have been modified at some point to accommodate more contemporary Christian values while keeping elements of the heathen heritage. However, the Christian philosophy provides consolation, not literary convention. That would make *Beowulf* less worthy as a literary piece, but more valuable as a religious text. The religious significance is apparent in *Beowulf*, as the implications of the heathen heritage found therein are changed to fit with the Christian religious narrative. There was also likely some selection bias as Christians had the monopoly over literature. It is still remarkable to see how much of the heathen heritage survives in an essentially Christian poem, though it is greatly warped and modified. Though there is a shift in tone in the second part of the poem, which starts with Beowulf having ruled the Geats for fifty years, we can be certain that the poem as it survives was composed by one single poet. In addition, the scholars have determined that the spelling inconsistencies are the fault of the two scribes who wrote down the poem. The first scribe made errors based on false presuppositions, while the second scribe did try to correct most of them, though he did not fully succeed. The errors, alongside the

current damaged state of the original manuscript make both transliteration and translation more demanding.

While *Beowulf* is often characterised as an epic poem, it is wrong to attribute to it only this denomination. *Beowulf* does have epic elements, but it would be better to describe it as a heroic elegy. The central focus in *Beowulf* is not necessarily on the narrative, but on the brooding reflection about the events that have transpired. Indeed, action is relatively fast-paced and is resolved in few lines compared to the introspections, the speeches and soliloquies that precede and follow it.

We also need to consider the audience for whom *Beowulf* was intended. The audience was probably nurtured on secular heroic poetry, and was presented with a familiar subject matter in a framework of Christian thought and teachings in *Beowulf*. This is not such an outlandish practise as Abbot Aldhelm is reported to have used poetry to attract audience for his preaching. Some of the poems must have been heroic in subject matter as the undertakings of warrior nobles was a very widespread topic in Anglo-Saxon poetry. (Godden and Lapidge 55)[20] The same could be postulated as one of the possible concessions the *Beowulf* poet was willing to make to attract an audience for his writing. We have also previously determined that these kinds of writings were most likely constructed in a way that the audience might recognise and recall parts of the narrative where old legends are alluded to. The problem that we encounter in translations of such texts is that the Modern English-speaking audience most likely are not acquainted with such subject matter and therefore cannot appreciate such intricately crafted allusions without prior or posterior research. This is a very difficult problem to resolve in translation and such faults cannot be mended without concessions.

[20] Scragg, D.G. *The Nature of Old English Verse*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, Godden & Lapidge, pp. 55

3.2 The worth of *Beowulf*

J.R.R. Tolkien describes the nascent modern *Beowulf* studies in allegorical terms. In short, *Beowulf* was considered from many points of view, historical, philological, mythological, archaeological, and folkloristic, but the poetic interpretation was oddly missing in his time. In fact, in his essay *Beowulf: The Monsters and the critics*; he reports Professor Archibald Strong's statement that "*Beowulf* is the picture of a whole civilisation, of the Germania which Tacitus describes. The main interest which the poem has for us is thus not a purely literary interest. *Beowulf* is an important historical document." *(*Tolkien*, Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* 104)

While the narrative in *Beowulf* has obvious historical implications, it only constitutes a part of the greatness of the poem. Even if we consider *Beowulf* in its historical context, caution is to be exercised. While there are blatant parallels and references to many historical events and facts, of which various genealogies, the grand Sutton Hoo ship burial and its likeness to Shield Sheafson's funeral, the hostilities between warring tribes, and various myths sung by the scops spring to mind, certain things in the poem were deliberately changed by the *Beowulf* poet to better fit his narrative. For example, taking mythology and folklore into account, it is clear that the poet had a certain Germanic legend in mind as a frame of reference for describing the undertakings of *Sigemund*, the dragonslayer. Yet, the problem is that in cognate traditions, like the Icelandic sagas, it is not *Sigemund* who slays the dragon, but his son *Sigurdr* (the same tale is also later emulated in such epic work as Wagner's *Nibelungelied*). (Orchad 108) The common Germanic frame of reference for the tales is obvious, but the *Beowulf* poet changed it for intriguing implications; the tale of *Sigemund* is told after Beowulf overpowers Grendel in hand-to-hand combat by tearing off his arm at the shoulder. This is significant because *Sigemund* literally means "victory-hand" (Orchad 173), and thus references Grendel's arm as symbol of victory for *Beowulf* when he presents it as a trophy to *Hrothgar*. While the historical and mythological background is important to consider, it is also necessary to keep in mind how these facts change within the context of the poem and in the service of the *Beowulf* poet.

In fact, Tolkien goes on to describe how the poetic worth of *Beowulf* trumps any marginal historical value it might have, and is independent of many historical facts that research has uncovered about *Beowulf*. While the author of this work contends that we cannot ever fully dissociate history from any work of literature, it is also important to emphasize the separateness of poetic form from the historical background to be able to truly grasp its beauty,

a stance taken out of necessity in the more technical and linguistic considerations of the translations in some of the later chapters. It is doubtful whether historical trivia will aid us in grasping the full complexity of the transposition of the Anglo-Saxon metre into Modern English poetic forms, but that is a given.

Truly, Tolkien contends, the poetic genius of the *Beowulf* poet is so strong in creating a sense of historical truth and perspective that it may even have been the reason behind such misplaced criticism of the poem (or the lack thereof). He asserts that the *Beowulf* poet had used "an instinctive historical sense – a part indeed of the ancient English temper (…); but he has used it with a poetical and not an historical object." (Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* 105) It is to the language and style of the Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse and the theme of the poem that we must turn to uncover the greatness that is *Beowulf.*

Concerning language and style, Tolkien brings to light the point of lofty style applied to a topic seemingly unworthy thereof, which Girvan had expressed in his lecture on *Folk tale and History in Beowulf.* Tolkien concludes that the *Beowulf* poet could hardly dedicate well over three thousand lines to an unworthy topic. This may not be a valid point because had the *Beowulf* poet truly applied such a technique to his poem, it would still be well situated within the context of the Old-English literature, which is ripe with examples of lofty style applied to topics of lowly commoner interest; this is especially the case for riddles for example. However, even if that were true, it is arguably also important to consider what the lofty style does to a common or unworthy topic; so tells us Tolkien. In *Beowulf*, the lofty style fits with the theme and setting of the poem, which concerns heroic undertakings of the warrior nobles. These warriors are aware of their position in society. They are quite familiar with the court decorum; they know how to address a higher lord, they know what is to be done before approaching him or even setting foot into the hall. Moreover, *Beowulf* is not overly focused on the narrative itself. The introspections and the reflections about the events that transpired constitute a larger part of the poem and are in fact the primary concern for the *Beowulf* poet. Therefore, while the poet may be concerned with the man on earth rather than his afterlife, the style with which the topics in *Beowulf* are dealt with lifts the tone of the poem considerably, and it does not do so inconsistently nor does it harm the poem in any way. Tolkien points out that "if there were a real discrepancy between theme and style, that style would not be felt as beautiful but as incongruous or false. And that incongruity is present in some measure in all the long Old English poems, save one – *Beowulf*." (Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* 111)

Tolkien argues that the quality of expression, the very thing for which *Beowulf* was primarily praised, is also to be found in other longer Old English poems, such as in the works of Cynewulf, in Guthlac, and in Andreas, among others. Therefore, the quality of expression found in *Beowulf* is in line with other poetry of the Anglo-Saxon period and is not unique to this particular poem. Instead, he points out, it is the theme which gives *Beowulf* its weight and makes it stand out among other great works of the Old English canon. With this in mind, we turn to the interpretation of the three translations of *Beowulf*.

4 SEAMUS HEANEY'S *BEOWULF*

4.1 *Beowulf* or *Heaneywulf*?

Heaneywulf is, or was, a derogatory term employed by Anglo-Saxonists to describe Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*. According to certain scholars, it was too far removed from the spirit of the original poem, and cannot have been called just *Beowulf*. Their argument may have some merit, "however, it is also important to note that even the most conservative editions of *Beowulf* have tacitly altered the text in a number of significant ways from what is found in the manuscript: modern lineation, capitalisation, word-division, and punctuation have been introduced, and abbreviations have been expanded, sometimes with unfortunate or downright misleading effect." (Orchad 40) In Heaney's defence, no translation is ever the same as the original and it is especially difficult to reproduce the effect of the original in literary translation. Furthermore, in such a case of translation as concerns translating Old English into Modern English, it is sometimes hard to resist the temptation of using familiar expressions, cognates of Old English words which were retained in Modern English but whose meaning has changed. Also, the alliterative verse has strict structural requirements and is thus harder to reproduce in Modern English due to changes in the language discussed in the chapter on the English language.

Heaney's particular style used in his translation of *Beowulf* is evocative of the substantially different nature of Modern English compared to the language of the Anglo-Saxons. Today's English is not strictly tied to one nation, belief system or set of values and many of the previously inherent cultural allusions in common speech have been diluted. In modern times we can speak of multiple Englishes, in fact. One such variant of English is the Ulster Hiberno-English, the vocabulary of which surfaces in Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*. In this act of employing a localised variant of English, Heaney fully embraces the sprawling and varied nature of contemporary English. This is a very genuine way of translating,

completely in line with the goals he had set, while also setting a down-to-earth tone for the poem in the process. This is crucial in bringing the past to the present, in bringing *Beowulf* closer to the modern reader unfamiliar with the Anglo-Saxon world. The danger of such practise is the language becoming too specific and narrow, and too localised for a wider audience to fully grasp.

Heaney reports that his own translation of *Beowulf* is "about one-third Heaney, two-thirds duty to the text," (Chickering 161) which automatically implies that the text may not strictly adhere to conventions. In other words, Heaney set out to not only translate *Beowulf* for the sake of *Beowulf*, but also to assimilate it into his own literary canon by infusing it with a sense of his own poetic style. Indeed, Heaney's *Beowulf* is criticised for being more of an "original work" than a translation (Geremia 63), "an act of appropriation" (Geremia 63) of the original work, and not without reason. Heaney's translation is meant for the wider audience, and for this reason, it will necessarily be rather different than other translations in both expression and tone. We need to keep these principles in mind when analysing Heaney's translation but we also have to consider the original work as it was meant to be interpreted. This dichotomy will form the basis of the interpretation that follows.

4.2 Interpretation

The very first word of the poem is controversial in some regard. *Hwæt!*, an exclamation used by *scops* and gleemen to call for the audience's attention was rendered by Heaney as "So". This was criticised for being too colloquial, as opposed to the equivalents proposed by other translators, such as Liuzza's "Listen!" or Gummere's and Tolkien's "Lo!". Heaney explains that it was the correct choice because it is the typical way of calling for attention for the Scullions. "Howe thinks that Heaney's translation, in the very first lines, tends to "level the diction" of the poem and to "flatten [its] claim on the audience" (Geremia 61), which does have merit as heroic poetry is characterised in part due to its elevated style. The overly colloquial way of transferring a tale of epic undertakings and rendering grand speeches of kings and heroes in a colloquial way arguably diminishes the greatness of the work and moves the literary work away from the intended direction, both tone-wise and subject-wise. However, the true question is whether the elevated expression found in the original *Beowulf* should be transferred to contemporary English translations at all. For Heaney, this was unacceptable, as he set out to make a translation understandable and relatable to a wider audience. While "So" is more natural to the Modern English reader, the criticism still stands because it is rather weak as a call to attention. Heaney's "So" both lacks

the necessary punch to interrupt a previous action or discourse and is on the low end of the register spectrum. While the role of "So" may simply be to provide a transition from one topic or discourse to another, poetry begets something more to add depth, beauty, connotation, and reference. Though *Hwæt* does not participate in alliteration, and it often does not count towards the number of syllables in scansion attempts, it is the very first word in *Beowulf* with a specific function, and Heaney's bland "So" leaves much to be desired.

Heaney's bland expressions come to light in what are supposed to be gnomic passages in the poem. Let us compare Gummere's, Tolkien's and Heaney's translation of one particular passage in the poem, in that order;

"Sorrow not, sage! It beseems us better friends to avenge than fruitlessly mourn them."[21]
"Grieve not, O wise one! Better it is for every man that he should avenge his friend than he should much lament"[22]
"Wise sir, do not grieve. It is always better to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning."[23]

Heaney's "wise sir" is too evocative of the British upper class to fit into an Anglo-Saxon poem. Even the punctuation does not suggest this is a majestic and powerful exclamation and there is little force behind said words. Heaney's lines give the impression that the speaker is attempting to calm an upset person, not provide consolation and urge his interlocutor to take action. The lines in question are also structurally unsatisfactory as Heaney's version contains at least five stressed syllables in the first line (whereas the following line is fine). The first line also does not have any alliteration. (The semivowel /W/ and the vowel /A/ could alliterate as per the rules of the alliterative scheme, but it is usual for /W/ to alliterate with itself due to plentiful options). The following lines express much of the same sentiment. Though there are explicit instructions to Hrothgar that he should take action rather than give in to despair, references to warrior's legacy after his death sounds much gloomier than intended by the *Beowulf* poet. In fact, Heaney makes it seem like there is little to do in general for a warrior to make a difference in the word except win fame. Tolkien and Gummere both interpret the original lines as fame being the best option for a warrior to achieve immortality, though they do not exclude other paths to eternity. Tolkien's version

[21] Gummere, Chapter 21, line 1384, p. 85
[22] Tolkien, 1156, p. 101
[23] Heaney, line 1384, p97

expresses this sentiment in the most appropriate way, though structurally it cannot compare with Gummere's (not only because the former is written in prose). For example, Tolkien's version could be shortened and still retain the essential elements that express the intended meaning. It would have been possible for Tolkien to eliminate some particles and pronouns. In addition, it would have been better to retain word order consistent since he opted to repeat the verb "should" in the second sentence. "that he should his friend avenge than he should much lament", for example retains the end-weight of the main verbs in the sentence and more firmly holds the structure of the sentence. Gummere's version is structurally the best by far; the compactness of two stressed syllables per line is preserved and the unity of the line is bound by alliteration over the caesura.

4.2.1 Ulster English word-stock and other features of word choice

Ulsterisms are the most noticeable novelty introduced by Heaney in his translation of *Beowulf*. Heaney chose to employ Ulsterisms after he had located the verb *Þolian*, "to suffer" in the poem. This Old English word survives in the dialect spoken in Northern Ireland and Scotland, and Heaney formed a particular connection to the Anglo-Saxon heritage when he encountered the word in *Beowulf*. This in turn helped to also set up the overall tone of the poem, as he remembered the word being uttered by a particular type of people (the Scullions, or kitchen boys, servants). This manner of speaking, described by Heaney as "solemnity of utterance" and "weighty distinctiveness", was deemed appropriate for Heaney to employ in his translation of the poem. The word *þolian*, or its Ulster cognate "to thole", is an interesting word to consider since it is an Anglo-Saxon word which survives in a dialect of Modern English that is spoken in an area outside the "original" Anglo-Saxon realm. However it is no longer considered part of the Standard English word-stock, and this is the primary point of heavy criticism aimed at Ulsterisms. [24]

Hiberno-English words are archaic, according to Milfull-Sauer (2003). (Chickering 173), for example, considered Heaney's translation a "disservice to students", to people who face *Beowulf* for the first time, because Hiberno-English words mislead the reader, suggesting the idea that the original poem contained Gaelic terms mixed with the Anglo-Saxon ones, which is not true. These words sound intrusive because, mixed with Standard English, they seem to bear a political connotation which, of course, is not present in the original: they may

[24] See Chickering, *Beowulf and 'Heaneywulf'*, (2002) , and Geremia *Heaney's Beowulf*, (2007), among others.

invoke the historical conflict between Ireland and England and English colonization in the reader. They represent not only an "act of appropriation" of *Beowulf* but, in a way, also a "political claim" (Geremia 65), as though they tried to "subvert the Englishness of the poem" (Chickering 174). Words such as *clan, brehon,* and *sept,* are specifically linked to Gaelic society and seem to hint at Irish history, which is inaccurate and arguments can be made that they have no place in *Beowulf* of whatever calibre. The effect thereof is in complete contrast to what Heaney set out to do with his translation when he defined his goal as being the making of a "foursquare" translation of *Beowulf* that is more accessible to the Modern English reader. However, students may belong to a demographic which tackles *Beowulf* with different goals in mind than the wider audience who read mostly for pleasure. The latter could appreciate the beauty of Heaney's poetry as realised in *Beowulf* but the former might object to false allusions implicit in his choice of vocabulary, most prominently featured in the Hiberno-English words, to the lack of alliterative structure, and the overly down-to-earth tone of the poem, all of which undermine the credibility of Heaney's translation and betray the spirit of the original work.

While the "solemnity of utterance" and "weighty distinctiveness" (Heaney 27) of Ulsterisms may share some features with Old English poetic language, *Beowulf* is ultimately a poem of elevated style and diction, which is almost completely nullified by the tone set by Heaney. *Beowulf* is consistently lofty in style, while Heaney is inconsistent in his own translation.

Heaney writes that "the elevation of *Beowulf* is always, paradoxically, buoyantly down to earth" (Heaney 21) in the introduction to his translation of *Beowulf*. He might suppose that because the subject matter is focused on the material, the now, and the "this-worldly", rather than the spiritual, the future, and the afterlife, the tone of the poem is more mundane and down-to-earth. However, this is false on both accounts. While *Beowulf* as a poem may be concerned with the earthly life and possessions rather than the Christian afterlife, the language used to treat the subject matter is essentially and consistently elevated. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the poet of *Beowulf* would have dedicated 3182 alliterating lines to a subject not worth treating. The *Beowulf* poet clearly thought the mundane topics of earthly life had value, perhaps in the preservation of the Germanic cultural heritage, perhaps in the way it portrays the dauntless character of heathen heroes. Therefore, *Beowulf* is at least not unworthy in subject matter. It was probably deemed valuable by the contemporary readers, and it was most likely considered to be elevated in style. Heaney foregoes to emulate the latter, possibly because he presumed the former was not the case.

Heaney recognised that at least some of the speeches should be the parts of the poem that show grand and elevated expression, and his choice of vocabulary in some speeches reflects this. Nevertheless, he often violates his own principle of natural language use to accommodate for the requirement of elevated style. Perhaps it is this poetic urge for elevated expression that prods Heaney to use no-man's language as well as to employ a number of literary words in certain instances, such as "mere" for "lake", or the very specific "bier", referring to a frame on which a coffin is placed before burial or cremation, which is harder to interpret for modern readers without background knowledge. Take also the "path of exile" expression, which to readers familiar with Anglo-Saxon society and concerned with staying true to the spirit of the original *Beowulf* makes perfect sense, but the full allusion to a social practise whose extent was pivotal in Anglo-Saxon society escapes the average unacquainted modern reader for whom Heaney meant this translation. Sporadic use of such vocabulary makes his translation inconsistent in that regard. Literary no-man's-language coupled with Hiberno-English words make the language in his translation vastly differ from standard variations of English. This also creates distance between the text and the typical Modern English reader.

4.2.2 Verse structure

However, Heaney went one step further and even structured some speeches and tales differently than the rest of the poem. For example, the tale of Sigemund, which is told in celebration of *Beowulf* having defeated Grendel, is presented in italics and the half-lines are indicated by spacing, unlike the rest of the poem. The episode of Finn's stronghold[25], where the conflict between the Danes and the Frisians is described through the recounting of a series of blood-feud driven revenge killings, is similarly formatted, though in this case Heaney also adds line breaks after each half-line in addition to the aforementioned increased spacing between them. This is even necessary as these parts of Heaney's *Beowulf* barely contain any cross-caesura alliteration, so the structure of the poem is harder to define. Again, we see how the changed nature of English necessitates the use of punctuation and verse line organisation to make sure the flow of the poem is well understood, should the poet opt not to include alliteration to provide a stable base for verse structure. Heaney also organises the poem into logical stanzas, whereas the original poem is missing any such strict divisions.

[25] Lines 1070-1158 (Heaney, 71-82)

Another necessary emendation or adaptation of Heaney's translation is the inclusion of marginal glosses explaining both the previously mentioned Ulsterisms and summarising and accentuating key points of the narrative. This may have been employed by Heaney partly because of the somewhat confusing narrative structure in *Beowulf*, which is ripe with digressions and reflections, and whose main focus is not necessarily on the narrative itself. The marginal glosses certainly help the reader better understand *Beowulf* in general and are in line with his main goal of producing an accessible translation thereof.

4.2.3. Kennings and alliteration

Another choice made by Heaney to bring *Beowulf* closer to the audience is the reduced density of kennings, which diminishes even further as the poem draws to a close. Heaney himself states that he does not follow the poet's style of creating kennings for battle and weapons, but this extends to other categories as well. This is tied to another principle where he prefers natural "sound of sense" over demands of convention. This is in direct conflict with the nature of the original poem, as it is the by-product of a literary convention stemming from the common Germanic poetic patterns. Heaney therefore announces that he decidedly breaks with this convention, which arguably diminishes the value of his translation in relation to the original poem as the distance between *Beowulf* and Heaney's *Beowulf* grows. Heaney's translation truly has grounds for being called an authorial work, rather than a translation.

Though Heaney claims he did not follow the poet's style of creating kennings for battle, this happens on numerous occasions in other semantic fields. The reduced amount of kennings is the main difference between Heaney and the *Beowulf* poet. Many kennings follow the same pattern as their equivalents in Old English; some are even literal translations thereof. Heaney's ring-giver corresponds perfectly to the Old English *beah-gifu*, "bone cage" is literally *ban-cofan*, "sail-road" is used to render *sægl-rede*, house of the flesh is clearly *flæsc homan*. The kennings for the Sun show this as well; Heaven's joy is *heofones wynne*, world's candle is *woruld candel*, heaven's gem is *heofones gim*. *Earð-hus* is rendered as "earth-house" and *hord-weard* is translated as "hoard-guardian" and "hoard guard". The dragon is also referred to as the "mound-keeper", or *beorges weard*. *Sæ-cyninga* is also literally "sea-kings", "bone house" refers to *ban-hus*, and so on.

There are instances where Heaney invents kennings where there are none in the equivalent verses in the original poem. For example, he uses "ring-giver" in the same line where in the Old English text we find a relative clause *ðe us ðas beagas geaf* ("who gives us

rings")[26]. Sometimes he changes the kenning in the original to have different connotation, such as in "the wide rim" for a shield, where in the Old English text we find *mægas scyld* (kinsman's shield). In this case, he needed the initial /w/ for alliteration, but often his kennings either do not help the alliterative scheme at all, (and they should as that is one of the principal purposes of kennings), or they stretch the limits of acceptable alliterative patterns. The example of the latter is to be found among compounds where the second element alliterates with other constituents of the half-line and/or the line, such as "sky-roamer" in line 2846, where "roamer" would alliterate with "rigid" from the second half-line. However, this should never happen as we have previously explored the significance of front stress for open-class words in general, but also for compounds. The second constituent of compounds may at best have a half-stress, but this is insufficient for proper alliteration. Another example of such a misused kenning is "war-gear" in line 2636, which should alliterate on the "gear" part to have alliterative structure, but this cannot happen. [27] The first stress in the verse line should be "good", as "make" is not prominent enough to bear full stress. The second stress is then "gift", and here we can mark the caesura. But then the only remaining stress is on "war" in "war-gear", and the half-stress on "gear", which cannot alliterate. One emendation to his could be to detach "war-gear" and make it a noun phrase consisting of a modifier and a noun, but even then, the gear would be the last stress in a line, which should not alliterate. One could further modify this half-line into "gear of war" but then we would have two "of" phrases in a row, which would not fit well. Overall, Heaney's choice is good from a general poetic point of view, but betrays the principles of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Alliteration here only serves the aesthetic function similar to that of end-rhyme.

In other cases, Heaney forms periphrastic kennings. This refers to kennings which consist simply of a pre-modifier and a noun. These kennings are not metaphorical and are merely words used for their base meaning with a modifier attached to the front. One of the main purposes of such kennings in the original text was to help build the alliterative scheme. But Heaney's kennings of such type do not serve this purpose at all. Kennings such as "war-king" in line 2336 or the previously considered "war-gear" often do not alliterate, even though the main point of adding a modifier to a noun in crafting such kennings is to help build the alliterative scheme, as was done by the *Beowulf* poet. Other similar examples include: "arms-bearing thanes" in line 2642 where alliteration is only loosely retained on the last stressed syllables in each line, which breaks the rule of convention; "war-sword" in lines 1520 and

[26] Line 2535, (Heaney 179)
[27] "make good the gift of the war-gear"

2886; “ring-hall” in lines 2010 and 2840. However, periphrastic kenning-crafting would be also employed to better balance the number of syllables in the two half-lines. For example, the “war-king” in line 2336 brings balance to the number of syllables in the A and B verses (5 and 6, respectively). Furthermore, the “war” modifier makes the verse flow better as the stressed “king” constituent is reduced, thereby resulting in a trochaic feet, rather than two fully stressed syllables following one after another.

Nevertheless, when such kennings do help alliteration, they sometimes do so by alliterating on the second constituent instead of the first. Take, for instance, Heaney’s “the shepherd of our land”[28] in line 2644, which corresponds to *folces hyrde* in the original text. The alliterating word is “land”, but “land” is also the very last stressed syllable in the line, and thus, should not count towards the requirements of the alliterative scheme. Consider also the previously mentioned “sky-roamer” in line 2830[29], which alliterates with “rigid”, which is the last stressed syllable, as well as the example of “war-gear.”

What should also be noted is that Heaney sometimes takes existing elements of previously established kennings to form new ones. This is completely in line with the principle of formulaic language, according to which new speech patterns can be formed based on old ones by substituting one constituent of a phrase with another of same value.

However, the violation of the alliterative scheme makes Heaney’s translation rather unfaithful to the verse structure of the original poem, and further drives home the notion of Heaney’s translation being more of an authorial work or a re-interpretation thereof, as far as verse structure and vocabulary choice is considered. The importance of alliteration for Anglo-Saxon poetry cannot be overstated, as was discussed on multiple occasions in this work.

4.2.4. Proper nouns, *Haiti*

Another domain where Heaney is rather inconsistent is the translation and rendering of proper nouns. To describe proper nouns and how they interact with their related kennings and compounds, a term from Scandinavian literary theory, *Haiti*, is most useful. *Haiti* refers to the kennings created specifically for use in alliterative schemes instead of proper nouns they stand for. The most famous examples of *Haiti* come from Norse poetry concerning *Oðinn. Oðinn* is the Norse god who is known under numerous names created for alliterative purposes but these

[28] “(…) by himself alone – the shepherd of our land, (…)”
[29] “(…) so that the sky-roamer lay there rigid (…)”

Alfadhirhaiti [30]also contain deeper allusions to some aspects of his character or to some course of action he might take in that particular poem, etc.

Heaney's approach to and varied treatment of proper nouns has several problems. Firstly, there is the issue of spelling. To clarify this point, let us consider the very first name which we encounter in *Beowulf*; *Scyld Scefing,* or, Shield Sheafson, as Heaney modernised it. We first note the difference in how the /ʃ/ phoneme is represented; in 10th-century Old English, the [sc] consonant cluster could be read as either /ʃ/ if the word had been an English word of Anglo-Saxon origin, or /sk/, if it was a Viking age borrowing from Old Norse. Modern English spelling conventions dictate that /ʃ/ be represented by SH, so *scyld* becomes "shield". The same happens with the root morpheme of the second word of the character's name, *sceaf,* which becomes "sheaf". In Old English, the *–ing* suffix was used as a patronymic suffix among other things. Heaney was most creative and ingenious here, as *Scyld* is a Dane. It is typical of the Scandinavian languages to use the *–son* suffix to indicate the father's name. The issue is whether modern readers would recognise that this is a patroynm, as modern surnames are often opaque in their exact meaning unless it is a very common and popular surname, like Smith. So, the modern reader might presume that the person's name was Shield Sheafson, whereas the truth is that his name was only Shield. Sheafson was only used as a patronym, which does not quite hold the same weight as a modern surname does, though patronyms were amongst the sources from which surnames developed. The Anglo-Saxon audience would most certainly have recognised the person as *Scyld,* son of *Sceaf,* rather than *Scyld,* as a name, *Scefing,* as a surname. Indeed, surnames did not exist in Anglo-Saxon England, and only appeared after the Norman Conquest. Heaney's solution, therefore, while ingenious and clever, does not quite hold true to the original expression used in the Old English poem. A translation along the lines of Shield, son of Sheaf, would have more precisely conveyed the proper meaning. Oddly, Heaney does use this formula to refer to Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow.

The second issue with names is their pronunciation. While Shield Sheafson was resolved most favourably, some names have odd spellings considering Heaney's effort in modernising the aforementioned name. Take, for instance, the already mentioned Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow. The modern reader will likely pronounce "Ecgtheow" with great issue; they may not even know where to start. One possibility is /'ekþeow/, but the "cg" cluster was read as /dʒ/ in Old English, and would therefore not correspond well to the original name. The

[30] "Names of the All-Father"

potential meaning of the name is also obscure so it is difficult to determine the exact cognate word in Modern English, if such a word survives. Still, even according to modern spelling conventions, the consonant group "cgth" is unattested in Modern English. Consider also the frequently occurring name *Hygelac*. In Old English, this would have been pronounced as /'hygelak/. The "Y" produces the close front rounded vowel, the same that the German "ü" stands for. In Modern English the name would be read as /'hɪgəlæk/. While there is a clear distinction between Old and Modern English pronunciation, the word can still be read out loud by a Modern English speaker. Take, however, other more obscure names as *Eofor*, *Wægmundings* or *Wealhtheow*, which were unchanged by Heaney and produce wildly different pronunciations than what their Old English equivalents would sound and are harder for the Modern English speaker to read. While Heaney set a goal of bringing *Beowulf* to the wider audience with a "natural language" and "four-squareness", he curiously decided to leave some names obscure and opaque in meaning and reference, without even modernising their supposed pronunciation patterns.

Some names are well formed even for Modern English standards, such as *Ohtere*, *Eanmund*, though others, such as *Weohstan*, while in line with rules, would probably have been underwent vowel reduction, and would have become "Westan", or something to that effect. The name of Beowulf's sword, *Nægling*, while fine from a phonetic point of view, would most likely have underwent reduction but would also have been simplified in terms of spelling. If we consider the development of vowel groups in English, "Nayling", or "Nyling" might be possible solutions.

The names and their *Haiti* sometimes do not participate in the alliterative scheme. Take, for instance, Ring-Danes[31], or Victory-Shielding[32], both of which alliterate on the second constituent once out of the two instances in which we find it. In these instances, Heaney decided to keep the same kenning for consistency, sacrificing conventional alliteration in the process. One of the consistent formulas throughout Heaney's *Beowulf* is "Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke". The line alliterates on the second and the fourth stress, which violates the basic principle of alliteration in the Anglo-Saxon verse. Furthermore, we cannot reliably scan the line and determine the caesura with certainty. One principle of the alliterative Anglo-Saxon verse states that it is based on common speech patterns. This manifests itself in the form of short phrases, which form the half-lines, which in turn form the

[31] "(…) for the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes (…), line 116;
"Just so I ruled the Ring-Danes country" in line 1769.
[32] "(…) from the Victory-Shieldings, the shoulderers of the spear", line 598;
"(…) on the Victory-Shieldings and violated (…), line 2004; "

verse line. These phrases usually correspond to linguistic phrases, and are indivisible by syntax. Therefore, we have to scan "son of Ecgtheow" as a unified indivisible phrase. This is problematic because it both breaks the usual line structure consisting of half-lines corresponding to common speech phrases, but also because it breaks the alliterative scheme. The latter could be salvaged if the two stresses in the phrase alliterated, but the line structure would still be inconsistent with the principles of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse because it does not use the common speech patterns as bases for the construction of the half-line. The very strict requirements of the alliterative verse line make the poem's word order scrambled, but the individual verse building blocks are still indivisible speech phrases. By tending towards natural speech, Heaney breaks the very structure of the poem he is trying to translate.

One other bright point as regards names in Heaney's translation is the transformation of the Beowulf of the Shieldings into Beow, according to the reconstruction of the genealogy of the Shieldings done by Tolkien and other scholars. This clears up any confusion the reader might have had had the name of the person in question remained Beowulf, as is the case in the original poem.

4.2.5 Summary on Heaney

As we have seen, Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* is somewhat distanced from the original Anglo-Saxon poem in both spirit and structure. The narrative is the same, but *Beowulf* is not only about the narrative; Tolkien would argue that the narrative and the significance of the historical facts found therein are of lowest priority when interpreting *Beowulf*. Heaney set out to make a "foursquare" version of *Beowulf* which would be more accessible to the modern reader, but he at times inconsistent in avoiding "no-man's-language" and applying the principle of language natural to the Modern English speaker. *Heaney's Beowulf* expressions flow well from one another and his translation is of high poetic quality, a fact with which many critics would agree. It fits neatly into Heaney's own literary opus. However, if we view Heaney's *Beowulf* through the lens of a scholar of Anglo-Saxon poetry, it betrays key structural principles thereof and cannot be considered a faithful rendition of the greatest heroic elegy of Anglo-Saxon literature, despite the poem's narrative and themes being left intact. Instead, Heaney's *Beowulf* is a translation in lieu with Heaney's poetic design of rereading the poem across cultural boundaries.

5 J.R.R. TOLKIEN – UNCOVERING THE MEANING OF *BEOWULF*

5.1 An unknown gem of *Beowulf* translation surfaces

We turn now to a rather different translation of *Beowulf.* Interestingly, J.R.R. Tolkien did not publish his translation of *Beowulf* himself. He deemed it unworthy and unsatisfactory for his standards to be published. We are lucky however, that Chistopher Tolkien, his third son, published *Beowulf – A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* in 2014. This is an incredibly important work, despite Tolkien's disdain for his own translation. Even if we agree with Tolkien on the quality of his translation, the book is a great resource because of the commentary on translation of *Beowulf.* The commentary is incredibly useful and deals with the theme, the topics, the language, the style, and the idiom of *Beowulf* to the last detail. Tolkien seems to have intended for his translation to most accurately echo the meaning expressed by the original poem, foregoing the restriction but also the beauty that the alliterative verse brings, opting instead for a translation of *Beowulf* in prose. One of his goals was for this translation to help students of *Beowulf* come to terms with the original poem. The students in his time would have surely found his notes exceedingly useful, as do the scholars and students nowadays. Tolkien himself was an expert scholar of Anglo-Saxon, and taught numerous courses on Anglo-Saxon literature and language during his tenure at Oxford. Some of the commentary comes from those very lectures. However, Christopher Tolkien contends that "his translation would of course have been addressed primarily, though not exclusively, to readers with little or no knowledge of the original language." It may be true that his translation would be well received by such readers, though it can also be postulated that the ones who would truly benefit the most would be those who study *Beowulf* in some form, be it for scholarly endeavours or for their personal enjoyment, because it is a wonderful resource to have at hand when dealing with the original poem.

Though there is a fragment of Tolkien's attempted translation of *Beowulf* in alliterative verse, he abandoned such a cause. Instead of imitating the regularities of the old poetry, Tolkien was determined to "make a translation as close as he could to the exact meaning in detail of the Old English poem, far closer than could ever be attained by translation into alliterative verse, but nonetheless with some suggestion of the rhythm of the original." (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 25)

"Of Old English verse he wrote: 'In essence it is made by taking the half-dozen commonest and most compact phrase-patterns of the ordinary language that have two main elements or stresses. Two of these [phrase-patterns], usually different, are balanced against

one another to make a full line." (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 25) Christopher Tolkien seems to think that J.R.R. Tolkien also wrote in rhythms founded on 'common and compact prose-patterns of ordinary language', with no trace of alliteration, and without the prescription of specific patterns, despite not finding any reference to this by Tolkien himself. We shall explore this proposition in a later chapter on Tolkien's language use in his *Beowulf*.

Christopher also explains how some unusual features of Tolkien's language surface in his translation of *Beowulf*. One such example is the phenomenon whereby –ed endings bear some stress and become fully fledged syllables instead of undergoing vowel reduction, as is often the case in Modern English. This is indicated by the editor as *–éd* instead of simply *–ed*. Furthermore, Tolkien seems to have preferred the use of *unto* instead of *to*. Even the archaic ending for the third person singular of the present tense *–eth* surfaces on occasion. Also, the preposition *therein* is expanded into *there-within* (though he does use therein at line 110). All of the aforementioned serve to establish a certain rhythm, according to Christopher Tolkien. He identified this tendency quite accurately, despite there not being any authorial record on this matter by J.R.R. himself.

Overall, Tolkien's translation is rather different because of its originally intended purpose and because of Tolkien's high standards to which he held his own translation, which ultimately postponed the publishing thereof until well after his death. Though it is a prose translation, it still partly echoes the Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse because it is also based on the building blocks of the alliterative verse, which come from the common tongue. This adds a certain rhythm to the poem, despite the lack of intentionally crafted alliterative structure. The translation is also quite transparent in meaning and emulates the tone and sustains the theme of the poem.

5.2 Interpretation

Opening passage - *Hwæt!*

Tolkien opted to use "Lo!" as a translation for *Hwæt!*. The word is indicative of loftier style and makes the listener pay attention, which is the main point of this particular exclamation. However, it does not feel natural to the modern reader as it is rarely, almost never in fact, used outside poetry. Moreover, using verbs such as "lo", possibly a shortened form of Middle English *lokan*, "to look" *(Online Etymology Dictionary*), or *listen* can be perceived as issuing a command. While such an imperative gives force to the diction, it is

unnecessary in a lofty style of expression characteristic of Old English poetry. It would be better if the poet simply called for attention, while also setting a tone of formality. Perhaps other solutions, such as *Hail!* or *Hark!* might have proven fruitful as well. The former is well perceived even in Modern English standards despite having archaic undertones. The latter is further on the archaic language spectrum but might also work since it is a well-established call for attention in both Middle and Modern English literature.

Conclusively, Tolkien's "Lo!" works fine in this instance, but its archaic nature may be off-putting to the modern reader. *Hwæt* is also rendered as "Lo!" in other instances in Tolkien's *Beowulf*. See lines[33](769) (970) (1073) (1385) (1652) for more examples. Sometimes, however, Tolkien employs "Lo!" even where there is no *Hwæt* in the original poem. In line 1304 there is no *Hwæt!* in the original text, but Tolkien uses "Lo!" in much the same manner as *hwæt!* is used in Old English. In line 1362 the "Lo!" is again used in the same way as *Hwæt!* would have been used, but is missing from the original poem. This helps focus the attention of the reader to what the poet sees. The same happens in lines 1426, 1976, 2407, and 2500. Curiously, in line 1489 Tolkien uses "Lo!" in the same manner as the aforementioned cases, but Heaney decided to use "what" instead in lines 1489 (1774), 1893 (2248), which respectively correspond to lines 1774 and 2248 in the original poem.

5.2.2 Structure and design

It is important to note Tolkien's punctuation and structure of his prose translation. While his version may not be as diligent in recreating the alliterative verse or keen on creating kennings analogous to those found in the original, he still tries to form a structure that is evocative of the alliterative verse by use of punctuation. Let us consider some of the opening lines in Tolkien's translation.

It can be argued whether the initial "Lo!" should be included in the first half line or even the first line. It is the opinion of the author that this particular rendering of *Hwæt!* be excluded from scansion because it mostly serves the introductory role and the following verse can stand on its own without issues. It does not provide any support for the following half-line or verse and can therefore be set aside in scansions. *Hwæt!* features less prominent stress so even when it appears later in the poem it does not influence the verse line beyond boosting the number of syllables.

[33] According to Tolkien's verse-line enumeration of the translation.

Let us consider the initial passage of Tolkien's *Beowulf*:

"The glory of the kings	of the people of the Spear-Danes
in days of old	we have heard tell,
how those princes	did deeds of valour.
Oft Scyld Scefing	robbed the hosts of foemen,
many peoples,	of the seats where they drank
their mead,	laid fear upon men,
he who first	was found forlorn;
comfort for that	he lived to know,
mighty grew	under heaven,
throve in honour,	until all that dwelt
night about,	over the sea
where the whale rides,	must hearken to him
and yield him tribute	a good king was he!"[34]

In this short passage it is evident that the punctuation serves the same purpose as in the verse translations and the transliteration of the original poem; line and half-line division. Most of the commas come at half-line breaks. (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 26) The presented "half-lines" do not go over two stressed syllables per half-line except in one instance ("Oft Scyld Scefing robbed the hosts of foemen"), in which case the two half-lines are mirrored in length, stress distribution, and syllable number. At first sight, the structure echoes the Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse. However, the argument falls apart due to the lack of alliteration and a lack of sufficient stressed syllables in many lines. Though some alliteration is present, a large part of it is within the half-line, whereas what binds the alliterative verse together is alliteration across the caesura.

On the other hand, the clarity with which Tolkien has managed to retain the poetic imagery is remarkable. In certain cases, the language is more transparent in meaning and embellished to such a degree that it can possibly be considered superior to the original on some points. Keeping to the consideration of the aforementioned initial lines, we can point out his rendering of the *hronrade* at line 10: "over the sea where the whale rides". Tolkien introduces *sea* as the explicit image to evoke. He then keeps the *rade* part of the kenning by introducing the verb *rides* to keep a sense of movement through a path. He naturally keeps the

[34] Separation added and structure modified for emphasis.

whale designation. However, all of this serves to describe the noun *sea*. This is a most elegant solution because it not only has the common speech element recognisable to most speakers of English, but also builds upon it through the use of poetic imagery inspired by the Old English kenning. An analogous rendering of a kenning for the sea appears in line 163; "over the waters where the swan rides" (*ofer swan-rade*). This is also a prime example of formulaic language, which allows for substitution of constituents with their equivalents for variation, alliteration, or other purposes.

Similarly, Tolkien renders other kennings with entire phrases (but not full sentences) as is the case in the fifth line; "of the seats where they drank their mead". This is a rendering of the simple *meodo-setla,* but it is fully within the comprehension of the English speaker and feels like a natural part of speech, rather than an obscure expression denoting an arcane concept. Naturally, English has changed so much over the millennium that some tools previously used by the Anglo-Saxons are either restricted or outright unavailable to us. This type of expansive description of kennings needs to be kept in check if it is to be employed in alliterative verse translations, a restriction with which prose translation can do away. If we keep our eyes on the previously cited initial lines, we can clearly see that every major image is transmitted in the translation. Though "kings of the people of the Spear-Danes" is rendered rather clumsily, it fits the *Gar-Dena* (…) *theod-cyninga* of the original. "Spear-Danes" might be problematic for Modern English speakers to perceive, and a better alternative could have been something akin to "Spear-armed Danes", though that would have implications on the alliteration and the metric structure.

5.2.3 Archaic language

One intriguing word often employed by Tolkien is "oft*"*. Tolkien kept the original form of the Old English word and did not modernise it to "often" or rendered in some other way. "Oft" and "Lo!" are already two markers of archaic expression we can find in the opening lines of *Beowulf*. They are found repeatedly throughout his translation, and they fit well into Tolkien's choice of archaic vocabulary in his translation of *Beowulf.* A certain degree of distance in both time and register is to be respected when dealing with *Beowulf*, so his choice of archaic words is aligned with the principles of creating a faithful translation of *Beowulf.* We need to keep in mind that the *Beowulf* poet himself used words and spelling conventions which were considered archaic according to the standard of the presumed time of composition. Take, for instance, the *Beowulf* poet's spelling of *Gar-Dena* and *gear-dagum*. By the time of the composition of *Beowulf* (around the eight century), the *g* in *gear* will have

changed to produce a /j/ sound, while the *g* in *Gar-Dena* and the *g* in *dagum* will have retained the /g/ pronunciation. The *Beowulf* poet used these words with archaic pronunciation in mind, as beforehand the [g] in both of these words would have been pronounced as /g/. (Orchad 81) It could be argued that a certain archaic feel might even be required to make a faithful representation of *Beowulf*. Tolkien is therefore fully justified in his choice of archaic expressions.

Another interesting word to note is "fell" in the geographical sense of "high moorland", but also in the literary meaning "of terrible evil or ferocity; deadly" *(Oxford Online Dictionary*). Though the latter meaning is that of an adjective, one cannot help but notice the strong connotation behind Tolkien's use of this precise word and its double meaning. This is especially notable because Tolkien uses the very same adjective "fell" further in the text to describe Grendel in line 624 ("fell robber"). Tolkien also uses the past tense of the verb "to fall" ("fell") in a line describing Heorot being damaged but also in a sentence stating it ended up not being destroyed, which binds Grendel with the concept of struggle and the Danes' supposed sanctuary. He also uses this word to describe the things against which his armour should protect him; "the fell clutch of angry foe." (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 31) This too binds the circumstances in which the word is used; it is a warning against the dangers of the enemy, but can also serve as a foreboding of Beowulf's impending victory, as "fell" things have proven to be no match for Beowulf (likewise in line 1511 *hilde-tuxum*, "fell tusks", which could not penetrate Beowulf's armour). Other instances of "fell" include; line "Fell-deeds" (line 1411), "fell brood" (1688), "the naked dragon of fell heart" (1915) "fell beast" (1941), "fell winger" (1950), "fell oppressor" (1952), "fell-fire's heat" (2120, "fell purpose" (2155, used for both Beowulf and the Dragon), "fell mood" (2168), "fell fire-dragon" (2258), "exchange more fell (2494). We see how "fell" is an adjective which Tolkien often associates with the evil foes Beowulf faces, and they are thus bound in notion and by language. Interestingly, Heaney uses 'fell' in the geographical sense in line 1409 but with none of the other connotations previously discussed. "Fell" is also used by Gummere in some corresponding instances in the poem, though not in all places where Tolkien used it.

"Wold" is another curious word, mostly retained in English place names. In Modern English it refers to "a piece of high, open uncultivated land or moor" *(Oxford Online Dictionary*). It comes from the Old English *wald* (or *weald*), meaning "high land covered with wood". The meaning is distinct from the Old English *wald*, which is present in the original poem, yet Tolkien retained its closest surviving Modern English equivalent. This slightly

changes the meaning but it fits with the slightly archaic choice of vocabulary Tolkien uses throughout the poem

Tolkien's vocabulary is ripe with archaic words like "ere", "nay", "doth" and so on. Curiously, Tolkien writes "thou durst" in line 1152. This is the archaic second person present simple form of the verb "to dare" (*Oxford Online Dictionary*). Here we find another instance of Tolkien trying to keep the overall effect of the Old English expressions in Modern English by using their Modern English cognates where still applicable. In the corresponding line in the original text *dyrre* is used, which is admittedly the subjunctive form, while the verb is in present simple in Tolkien's translation.

Tolkien does not only employ archaic vocabulary, he also prefers archaic grammatical markers. For example, he makes ample use of archaic personal pronouns, such as "thou", "thy", "thine" and "thee" for the second person singular, "ye" for the second person plural[35], and "mine" used alongside a noun rather than instead of one. One glance at a particular passage will illustrate their use; "Thou hast achieved for thyself with thine own deeds that thy glory shall live for ever to all ages. The Almighty reward thee with good, even as He hitherto hath done!" (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 78). Furthermore, Tolkien uses the archaic endings for the present tense; –est (as in "thou knowest", "thou prayest", "thou hast", etc), and "–eth", as in "hath", "followeth", "seemeth", "recalleth", "enjoyeth" and so on, for the second and third person singular, respectively. This is rather interesting because the Old English forms are similar to the aforementioned grammatical markers, which makes Tolkien's translation close to the original in that regard.

In addition, Tolkien uses archaic grammatical rules, such as using the "to be" auxiliary with movement verbs, as in "we are come", and archaic irregulars, such as "spake", "wert" and even contracts some expressions, such as "o'er" instead of "over", a practise often used in poetry to make the verses better fit the metre.

The archaic language used by Tolkien fits in well with gnomic passages in the poem. Gnomic expressions convey wisdom in some form; giving advice, providing foresight into the unfolding of future events, or stating a universal truth. The archaic loftiness of Tolkien's language gives more power to these passages, so their importance over surrounding text is properly stressed. "Thus doth a young man bring it to pass with good deed and gallant gifts, while he dwells in his father's bosom, that after in his age there cleave to him loyal knights of his table, and the people stand by him when war comes. By worthy deeds in every folk is a

[35] Interestingly, the Old English second person plural pronoun is *ge*, pronounced /je/ or /jei/, similar to this form.

man ennobled." (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 31) Note the use of the archaic "doth", the literary meaning with which "cleave" is intended to be interpreted, the uncommon "ennoble", but also the expressions "gallant gifts" and "father's bosom".

Sometimes Tolkien creates gnomic sentences in places where the original simply makes an objective observation. For example, in line 2324 "Treasure, gold hidden in the earth, easily may overtake the heart of any of the race of men – let him beware who will!" [36]Tolkien has completely changed the meaning. Heaney's version talks of how one might easily miss treasure buried under the earth in the equivalent lines, and the original poem seems to also be straightforward in the meaning. However, Tolkien included a gnomic message in the translation of this passage. He warns against avarice, a common motif in Northern European literature and myth. The modified gnomic passage ties in very nicely with the story of the dragon. The parallel Icelandic source for the story of the dragonslayer quite similar to that found in *Beowulf* talks of *Fafnir*, a man who turned into a dragon because of his greed for gold. He jealously watched over the hoard and transformed into a great *wyrm* over time but was slain by Sigurd. (Thorpe and Blackwell 234)

5.2.4 Syntax

Another marker of lofty and poetic language is the reorganisation of word order. While the inverted word order may make the translation confusing to read, it nevertheless adds to the beauty of expression employed by Tolkien. It can be argued that this is an attempt at imitating the more flexible word order typical of the Old English literary language, which is based on "common speech patterns." (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 25) However, even the original *Beowulf* contains instances where word order was scrambled to look like a pattern not typical of English. Sometimes, this was done to accommodate for alliteration; otherwise, it was employed to delay the main point or the most poignant image in the passage. This is evident in, for example, the *Beowulf* poet's description of Grendel's approach to Heorot, which is announced by the gradual unveiling of details, going from the general and most perceptible to the more subtle. Grendel is only explicitly revealed at the end of the passage. However, the word-order in Tolkien's case is mostly a marker of style and register; it does not have key structural implications.

[36] "Sinc eaðe mæg, gold on grunde, gum-cynnes gehwone oferhigian; hyde se ðe wille." lines 2764-2766 in the original poem (Heaney, 186).

Tolkien's scrambled word order can make the translation difficult to follow, as mentioned before. To expand on this point we can take into consideration the following passage describing a survivor of Grendel's onslaught.

"(…)	Thereafter not far
to seek was the man	who elsewhere more remote
sought him his couch	and a bed among the lesser chambers,
since now was manifested	and declared thus truly to him
with token plain	the hatred of that hall-keeper;
thereafter he	who escaped the foe
kept him	more distant and more safe."[37]

This type of organisation is not found in Tolkien's translation, but it is useful to divide his sentences in such away because some of the key elements of Tolkien's writing surface. As stated beforehand, Tolkien argued that the language of *Beowulf* is based on 'common speech patterns' which contain two main stresses. These constitute half-lines, and two half-lines form a single verse line. Although the overall excerpt is more difficult to read and probe, the individual constituent units (half-lines) are clear in what they express. Despite the prose nature of Tolkien's translation, the cited lines are remarkably similar to what we find in the original *Beowulf* (barring irregularities such as the exact syllable count, and the imbalanced number of stresses across the caesura in some cases). We do have to keep in mind the differences in language. Old English had a much more flexible word order due to inflections indicating the bonds between words. This was used by the *Beowulf* poet to the maximum degree possible, to accommodate for alliteration and to dramatically postpone a strong poetic image, as previously mentioned. The confusion that can be created by the use of such word-order is precisely one of the potential reasons why the 'common speech patterns' base is so important for the understanding of Old English poetry. Though speakers of Old English differed from Modern English speakers in what speech patterns they expected to find in a given text, it is likely that they would have found similar structures more difficult to process. Alliteration and speech patterns give the listener or reader an anchoring point so that they do not get lost in the text or discourse. Although Tolkien does not entirely keep the former, his translation does possess a certain rhythm based on speech patterns, and can potentially be

[37] Separation and organisation was added by the author of this work for emphasis.

organised into half-lines according to principles usually applied to poetic translations of Old English poetry. Indeed, any alliteration that may be present is better explained by the use of common collocations, rather than being intentionally crafted for structure building. Surely enough, much of the alliteration in Tolkien's translation occurs within the half-line, rather than extending across the caesura, giving alliteration a merely aesthetic effect, rather than the foundational function of half-line binding it had in the original poem. Alliteration in Tolkien is unlike that of Gummere and Heaney's to an extent in that the latter retain this function of alliteration, albeit to varying degrees. However, Tolkien's translation is in prose, so alliteration cannot be observed in the same vein as it appears in verse translations.

"Beowulf spake, the son of Ecgtheow." (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 57) In this line Tolkien keeps the word order present in the Old English poem. Though Tolkien had little structural use for alliteration[38], he still arranged the word order differently than what one might find in Modern English. This brings different words into focus and renders the passage formal and courtly, which is appropriate for the context of Beowulf giving a speech. In contrast, Heaney's version seems rather bland; we do not immediately get the sense that a great and important hero of the poem is starting to speak. By doing this, Heaney simplifies and brings down the tone of the poem to make his translation more accessible to the common reader.

Tolkien does not apply this formula consistently though; as early as in line 513 he writes the following: "Thus Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spake:" This may topple the sense of structure in the poem as *Beowulf* relies on repetitions for both linking seemingly unrelated passages and for foreshadowing of future events. Tolkien's version can be given some leeway as it is a prose translation, and he does keep most of the formula intact. Moreover, such modifications to the formula break the alliterative pattern Tolkien introduced into his translation, but as we have pointed out beforehand, the alliteration plays no major structural role in prose translations, at least not to the extent and with the same purpose it does so in verse translations. It could be argued that it would have been preferable to keep the basic format the same if only for consistency's sake; "Thus spake Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow." One could argue that this format might be more appropriate for the end of the speech, rather than its introduction, though the former is not unheard of in Modern English, if rare. In other instances, Tolkien sticks to the tried and true formula in Beowulf's first speech; "Beowulf

[38] Tolkien had foregone to implement alliteration across the caesura because there are no caesuras in his prose translation of *Beowulf*.

spake, the son of Ecgtheow" in line 782, and "Beowulf made answer, the son of Ecgtheow" in line 1155.

Sometimes Tolkien uses very short sentences containing few words; a subject, a verb, and perhaps another word or two. In his description of Beowulf's fight with Grendel he writes thus; "Fingers cracked. Out would the ogre go. Forth strode the knight." This produces a very dynamic and quick recounting of the battle and gives a good sense of pace. This is also in line with his principle of common speech patterns based on compact phrases usually with two main stresses, though depending on scansion, one could identify three main stresses in the second and third half-line. Nevertheless, this type of narration is very effective in setting a proper pace in some passages of the poem where the "marching rhythm" of the original *Beowulf* is to be imitated.

Tolkien's prose translation grants him more freedom to reorganise the thoughts and images as they appear throughout *Beowulf*. Whereas the poet is constricted to adhere to line structure, the prose writer can forego such limitations. The poet need not necessarily translate line by line, though the vast majority opt for such a procedure, which only further limits their choice in choosing how to develop poetic imagery. Regrettably, unnatural, "no-man's-language"[39] can develop out of necessity, rather than choice. This might make it feel forced whereas it can be a boon if employed with a clear purpose in mind.

5.2.5 Names

On the topic of names in *Beowulf*, Christopher Tolkien writes: "In the matter of proper names my father was inconsistent and sometimes found it difficult to decide between several possibilities." (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 66) Tolkien rendered *Scyldings* as it was spelt in the original poem, unlike, for example, Heaney, who accommodated for the modern spelling conventions and changed the name to "Shieldings". Numerous other names stay the same; Hygelac, Geats, Healfdene (whereas Heaney produces "Halfdane"), Ecgtheow, Hrethel, Heatholaf, Wylfings,, Ecglaf, Heathoreamas, Brandings, Beanstan, Wædsing ("Wael's son" in Heaney), Wædsing (a patronym, Tolkien also uses "the offspring of Wæds"), Hildeburg, Hnæf, Folcwalda, (Heaney writes "Focwald"), Eormenric, Swerting, Æscere, Yrmenlaf, Hereric, Hetware, and so on.

Interestingly, natural place names are sometimes left as they were in the original, but the translation of their names is given in parentheses. He did this for *Earnanæs* (Eagle's

[39] As Heaney put it in the introduction to his translation of *Beowulf*.

Head), *Hronesnæs* (Whale's Head). Tolkien also left *Hrefnawudu* the same, and he did put "Ravenswood" in parentheses, but for *Hrefnesholt*, which refers to the same place, he used Ravensholt. Oddly, he used two different names for what is most likely the same place. OE text also has no alliterative reason to change the name, though the transliteration convention separates the two constituents of *Hrefnes-holt* and *Hrefna-wudu* with a hyphen. This may even mean that the place was simply called Raven, or that there was a nearby landmark called Raven, and the woods nearby were then called "Ravens' wood" or "Ravens' holt".

Many of these names could have easily been at modernised, streamlined, or simplified. Perhaps "Weather-mark" could have been rendered as "Windmark", or "Wenmark" or "Winmark" if we follow the English name change conventions. He could have also used the translated place names for "Ravenswood" and "Eagle's Head", for example, as he did for "Beowulf's Barrow".

In line 1855, Tolkien calls the Danes "Warlike Scyldings", which corresponds to *Heaðo-Scilfingas* from the original poem (note the correction to the name misspelt by the scribe in the original manuscript). "Sea-loving Geats" is another curious name as this type of characterisation has no structural function in the translation; it does not enable alliteration, nor does it contribute significantly to the balanced syllable count. However, if we divide the translation into half-lines, as is typical of Old English poetry, then the words 'sea-loving Geats' can serve as the bearers of the two main stresses. The numbers on the right show the syllable count.

that then the sea-loving Geats 6	would have no better one 5
to choose for king 4	and keeper of the wealth 6
of mighty men	

On the subject of "Fate", in Old English "fate", *wyrd*, is a feminine noun. Tolkien gave it a deeper meaning than the common noun by using the feminine personal pronoun; "Fate goeth ever as she must!" (Tolkien, Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell 52) In Modern English, fate is a common noun, but Tolkien uses the feminine pronoun "she" to refer to Fate. Tolkien himself wrote that *wyrd* is grammatically simply the verbal noun to *weorðan*, 'turn out, become, happen'. He also points out how constructions with *wyrd* may simply be equivalents to passive sentences. (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 390)

However, one cannot help but notice a deeper connotation in this word, as Germanic folklore contains the concept of the '*Wyrd* sisters', the Fates (c.f. Shakespeare's "The Weird Sisters"), or the Norns, as they are called in Scandinavian myths. This personification ends up being rather fittingly symbolic, though not entirely analogous to the Scandinavian tradition as there are believed to be three *Wyrd* sisters who spin the wheel of fate. This can possibly be explained through metonymy, where one sister takes on the functions of the trio, and stands for the workings of fate as a common noun. Even throughout the text, Tolkien maintains this image of the Fate as an agent; in line 874 he describes how Hnæf of the Scyldings "fell by fate in the Frisian slaughter", suggesting that Fate had her hands in it. Despite the lowercase spelling it is fair to say that this passage still speaks about Fate in a way that suggests it having at least some independent agency. Some lines further in the text, Tolkien writes about how Hildeburg "lament(s) the decree of fate", which further enhances the idea of Fate as an agent. For more examples of *wyrd*'s agency see; "Fate took him" (996), "Fate goeth ever as she must!"[40]; "Fate oft saveth a man not doomed to die, when his valour fails not."[41]; "No lack shall there be to thee of thy desires, if thou dost achieve this deed of valour and yet live."; "Yet I will not from the barrow's keeper flee one foot's pace, but to us twain hereafter shall it be done at the mound's side, even as Fate, the Portion of each man, decrees to us."; "The shield well protected the life and limbs of the king renowned a lesser while than his desire had asked, if he were permitted to possess victory in battle, as that time, on that first occasion of his life, for him fate decreed it not."

On the other hand, Heaney does not explicitly personify Fate outside of using a movement verb. He simply repeats fate a second time and does so with a lowercase initial letter, intended to be interpreted as a common noun. This detracts from the understanding of fate (*wyrd*) as it was perceived by both the pagan Anglo-Saxons and the later concept of *wyrd* transformed under Christian influence and completely nullifies the mythological reference to fate.

Other abstract nouns are personified or made into a divine force as well, such as victory; "that warrior whom victory had blessed (line 1093) and death; "has death come upon him at the hands of a wandering murderous thing." (lines 1110-1111) In the equivalent lines, Heaney places the agency on the killer, rather than on death; "killer came in a fury and slaughtered him in Heorot. (lines 1330- 1331)

[40] *Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel!*, line 455 in the original poem.
[41] *Wyrd oft nereð unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen deah*. lines 572-573 in the original poem.

Finally, the name Beowulf itself warrants discussion. The first time the name is mentioned in the original Old English manuscript, and in Tolkien's original translation, it refers to a different Beowulf. The Beowulf in question is the son of Scyld, therefore, an ancestor of Hrothgar, rather than the eponymous hero of the poem, the son of Ecgtheow. In fact, it is explicitly mentioned in the line in which the name first appears that it is the "Beowulf Scyldinga", whom the poet is referencing. Christopher Tolkien resolved this confusion in his edition of his father's translation of Beowulf by shortening the name to Beow, and Heaney did the very same in his own translation. This point was further explained by Tolkien, who determined that it should have indeed have been Beow (literally "barley"), which goes with Sceaf ("sheaf" of "barley"), according to the mythological genealogy. In short, Tolkien believes that the transformation of Beow to Beowulf was a later alteration, and that the *Beowulf* poet had initially used Beow to refer to Beow of the Scyldings. Despite bearing the same name in the Old English manuscript, the two Beowulves cannot be one and the same character due to narrative conflicts; they do not live in the same time period and they belong to different dynasties. Tolkien mentions a theory positing that the two Beowulves are actually one historical character split into two. He quickly dismantles it, as the first one is merely a step in the mythical genealogy, while the second is only as historical as King Arthur, says Tolkien. "But the two are not on the same 'unhistorical' plane. Beow/Beowulf 'Barley' is the glorification (by genealogists) of a rustic corn-ritual *myth*. Beowulf the bear-man, the giant-killer comes from a different world: *fairy-story*. (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 245)

Finally, let us consider the following lines; "*that . . . there cleave to him loyal knights of his table* (Old English *gewunigen wilgesíþas) and the people stand by him"* (Old English *léode gelǽsten*) This is an example of Old English 'parallelism': the verb and subject are repeated but with variations, while the object 'him' remains the same. "Parallelism is not *mere repetition*, nor mere verbosity or word-spinning, under the necessity of 'hunting the letter', as this simple example shows. The *wilgesíþas* are the 'beloved companions', the members of the king's Round Table, the knights of his household or *comitatus*, who stand by his side at need; *léode* is more general: chief men, people: they follow him and render service. (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 248)

5.2.6 Kennings

As was previously hinted at, alliteration plays an aesthetic role in Tolkien's translation in that it helps build the rhythm. Tolkien does not use the full potential of kennings as such.

The function of kennings to accommodate for the requirements of the alliterative verse, is rendered obsolete. Therefore, kennings in Tolkien, serve an aesthetic function in that they help vary the expressions used; they are not a tool with which the writer aimed to account for the strict requirements of the alliterative verse. Though for the most part kennings do not support the alliterative scheme in Tolkien, they can serve to provide more information about the noun that is being discussed, and in the case of *Haiti*, they can reveal or stress the social function of the person in question, as well as provide a sense of etiquette when addressing nobles, for example. Kennings therefore retain most of their poetic function though the reason for their employment has become embellishment in Tolkien, as opposed to a necessity for the Anglo-Saxon poets.

Tolkien translates some kennings by calquing the Old English expressions. Take, for instance, "sailing path", which corresponds to *sægl-rade*, "heaven's gladness", which stands for *heofones wynne*, "shepherd of his folk" for *folces hyrde*, "under the vault of heaven" for *under heofones hwealf*, "sword of battle" for *hilde meceas*, "house of earth" for *eorð-huse*, "slayer of life" for *feorh-bonan* (or *banan*), "king of battle" for *guð-cyning*, and so on. This way of translation is most useful and most precise, especially when considering the Old English poem alongside the translation. This helps immensely with trying to understand the original poem in all of its intricacies.

However, when such practice is unsuitable for rendering kennings into Modern English, Tolkien opts to for descriptive phrases of some kennings to help the reader better visualise what the *Beowulf* poet had in mind. Consider such examples as; "she-wolf of the waves", which explains the compact *brym-wylf* in the original poem. In such phrases Tolkien prefers a descriptive phrase to a kenning for both notional and linguistic clarity. The use of the pronoun "she" makes it easier to associate the kenning with Grendel's mother, to whom it refers, but also rolls off the tongue more elegantly, and does not belong to "no-man's language". Some expressions which expand upon the meaning of the original text, such as "hoar-headed", which is rather clear for the reader to interpret and paints a vivid picture of a grey old man, where in the original we simply have *unhar",* meaning "very grey", are also to be taken into consideration. Curiously, the Old English prefix *-un* has the unusual quality of an intensifier in this case. Another case where Tolkien's kenning is clearer than the original is when he uses "water-demons" to render the Old English *niceras*. *Niceras* were a type of water monsters familiar to the Anglo-Saxons but over time the expression has lost its connotation. It is therefore much better to render *niceras* as "water-demons" than simply leave *niceras*, the exact referent of which is more than likely lost on most Modern English speakers.

At other times, Tolkien adds additional depth to certain expressions of the original poem. Take, for instance, "bark", which can have the archaic literary meaning of a ship or boat, which is in origin a variant of *barque*. But Tolkien may have played on words here, as "bark" can also be interpreted as "tree bark", therefore making "bark" a metonymy for ship. The original poem contains simply *naca*, meaning ship. Tolkien's translation adds further connotation to the expression in this regard. Other examples of metonymy include "boar-crests" which stands for helmets. In the original we find the *swin ofer helme.*

One of the most powerful kennings Tolkien created is the "dew of the sword". For full context, we will consider the entire passage where this is present; "Thereafter was this mead-hall, my royal house, on the morrow-tide red with dripping blood when day shone forth, all the bench-boards drenched with blood and the hall with dew of swords." (Tolkien, Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell 54) This excerpt dominates with the image of a stream, with blood resembling the water therein. The morrow-tide superbly captures the image with a double meaning of the next day and the tide (of the sea, for example), the blood drips, as water drips, and the benches were drenched in it. The passage finishes in a stunning kenning for blood "dew of the sword", or the dew that the sword produces. This was most definitely inspired by the Old English compound used in the original poem: *heoru-dreore*, which means 'sword-blood' or 'sword-gore'. The same passage in Heaney's version is not nearly as impactful, though it contains alliteration (for the most part) and is relatively well structured according to the principles of Old English verse. To compare Tolkien's rendering with Heaney's "slick with slaughter", [42]we can say that the latter is more appropriate because Grendel does not kill using swords. However, Tolkien presents the scene from the point of view of the Anglo-Saxons and portrays how they experience blood during and in the aftermath of slaughter. Tolkien also evokes represents combat and struggle, as opposed to Heaney's depiction of Grendel's outright overpowering the helpless Danes. If a sword draws blood, it is evident that the opponent can be killed (though ironically, Grendel's kin is impervious to sword strikes). Nonetheless, Tolkien imbues this passage with a sense of hope; there might yet be a way to overpower the brute that has caused them so much trouble. Heaney's version merely emphasizes the helplessness of the Danes and the effect of the slaughter onto their morale. The mere introduction of the sword as a part of a kenning can

[42] But when dawn broke and day crept in
over each empty, blood-spattered bench,
the floor of the mead-hall where they had feasted
would be slick with slaughter."[42] (Heaney 33)

change the perception of this passage. Indeed, the transition to the following section where Hrothgar changes the subject to give hope for the resolving of the conflict is thereby made smoother. This is rounded out by the passage where Tolkien describes Grendel's death by evoking much of the same or similar imagery present in the passage previously presented. "There the waters boiled with blood, and the dread turmoil of the waves was all blended with hot gore, and seethed with battle's crimson." (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 72) (lines 689-691). The kennings created to evoke the imagery of blood and water blending together in a red whirlpool of gore signalling Grendel's demise, like the "battle's crimson", is what binds these passages together; Heaney's translation lacks such cross-referencing via word-choice.

5.3 Conclusion

Tolkien demonstrates great knowledge of the fundamentals of Old English verse and seeks to emulate the experience through a prose translation which succeeds in bringing the reader closer to the common speech patterns speakers of Old English might have encountered while reading the original *Beowulf*. However, he opted against incorporating alliteration across the caesura which is a key structural feature of Old English verse. While alliteration does occur, it only occurs within the half-lines into which sentences in his translation could theoretically be split[43] to bind a common speech pattern together, and is better explained this way, rather than as explicit choice by the author to structurally bind nearby constituents.

At certain points, Tolkien puts specific information into brackets following a piece of text that may be seen as confusing or unclear. (1122 "Now lieth still that hand that aforetime availed to accomplish for you (O knights) all things of your desire." While his descriptive kennings work because they are embedded in the text itself or are a part of the story, these might suggest a sense of indecisiveness when it comes to translating *Beowulf*. They may also be a sign of the author conceding that he did not do an optimal job at translating that particular piece and that the readers may find that part unclear or confusing. Though Tolkien himself stresses that the bare story is not central to understanding *Beowulf*, one cannot but wonder why such explanations in parentheses were included, especially since he himself points out that such insertions detract from the reading experience. While they may help clear up confusing passages, they detract from the overall experience of reading the text and break the pace thereof. Since they are not integral to understanding the essence of *Beowulf*, Tolkien

[43] As was done in the analysis of the lines in the 5.2.4 chapter on syntax.

could have opted for better solutions, such as including footnotes or even devoting a section of a book to clarifying such mysteries. However, such clarifications are rare enough that they do not significantly alter the reading experience. Still, ambiguities and uncertainties of the translator could have been resolved in a simpler manner.

However, reading Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* alongside the Old English original gives good insight into how the poem works because Tolkien tended to emulate the effect the poetic imagery evoked in the original, which translated well into his own rendering of *Beowulf*. At times it seems like he explains the kennings of the Old English original, thereby painting a vivid image in the reader's mind. Reading the Old English original alongside it becomes much less cumbersome and the reader can more easily detect the parallels between the Old English expressions used by the *Beowulf* poet and those chosen by Tolkien to represent them. The reader can thereby see the links between the Modern English language and what constitutes its base; its Old English antecedent.

This is amplified by the syntactic structure used by Tolkien which in many places mimics the word order found in the original poem in Old English, as previously explained. Furthermore, some phrases are exact copies of Old English structures turned into Modern English. Take, for instance, the half-line; "Wealhtheow went forth" and compare it to the original poem where we find; *Eode Wealhþeow forð*. Despite the slight rearrangement of the word order, the structure is essentially the same and even uses the very same words, though their spelling and pronunciation have changed in Modern English.

Tolkien also correctly pinpointed the cause and purpose of the elevated style of diction that is present in the original poem and strove to accentuate this by emulating the tone of the Old English *Beowulf* as much as possible. Archaic vocabulary adds an aura of elegance to the language of *Beowulf*, and one could argue that it is even necessary for a proper rendering of *Beowulf*. "No whit he recked" (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell*)[44]to faithfully empower his words with elevated style.

[44] He paid no little heed.

6 F. B. GUMMERE – A FAITHFUL VERSE TRANSLATION

Francis Barton Gummere points out the three most necessary principles to translating *Beowulf* in his translation from 1910. The translator should take notice of 1) the general movement of the verse, 2) the strict beginning-rime, or alliteration, 3) the metrical peculiarities which are necessary to the chief features of A.-S. poetic style – as parallelism, variation, etc. Translations which in some way follow the original, but not in these essentials, and not consistently, will not do. We do not want, for example, the metre of Mr William Morris's *Love is Enough* for our translation of *Beowulf*. (Gummere 71)

6.1 Interpretation and commentary

Gummere also translates *Hwæt!* as "Lo", like Tolkien, though he does not employ the exclamation point. He merely puts a comma to separate it from the rest of the line. The initial line goes as follows; "LO, praise of the prowess of the people-kings", and it does scan better if we set aside the initial "lo" as far as the number of syllables is concerned, though the second half-line is rather weaker and a second stress must be added to the second constituent in the "people-kings" compound, which makes the construction unnatural to read. The "kings" element would at best have a half-stress according to the stressing principle present in the early Germanic languages. The compound would have been fine if the "kings" did not require a second stress to be added to fit the metre, so this could have possibly been resolved by separating "people" and "kings", though one solution would include an of-phrase, which would not fit well after the previous two of-phrases. The caesura cannot come after second stress, "praise" if we assume "LO" to carry the full stress because we should not separate "common speech patterns" to form half-lines, and "praise of the prowess" is one such pattern. However, "prowess of the people-kings" would constitute another such pattern, and we cannot use the same word for both patterns, so ultimately, the first line breaks some of the rules of typical Old English poetry. The "Lo," is consistent throughout Gummere's translation and fulfils the role of calling to the reader's attention without fail. In all cases the "Lo" is stressed but only in some cases does it constitute one of the primary stresses in a line and it never alliterates in Gummere, much like in the original poem. The "LO" does not participate in the primary consonant-based alliteration even when most of the other words begin with vowels and therefore alliterate as per the vowel-alliteration rule of Old Germanic poetry. Instead, the vowels carry the alliteration in those lines.

6.1.1 Language of Gummere's Translation

To begin, let us consider three different renderings of a particular passage from *Beowulf*.

"Dead is Aeschere, of Yrmenlaf the elder brother, my sage adviser and stay in council, shoulder-comrade in stress of fight, when warriors clashed and we warded our heads, hewed the helm-boars; hero famed should be every earl as Aeschere was!" [45]

"Dead is Æscere, the elder brother of Yrmenlaf; my counsels were his and his wisdom mine, at my right hand he stood when on fatal field we fended our lives, as the ranks clashed in battle and the boar-crests rang. Such should a good man be, of noble birth long tried in deeds, even as was Æscere!" [46]

"Aeschere is dead. He was Yrmenlaf's elder brother and a soul-mate to me, a true mentor, my right-hand man when the ranks clashed and our boar-crests had to take a battering in the line of action. Aeschere was everything the world admires in a wise man and a friend."[47]

It is evident how the tendency to literally translate passages from Old English into Modern English equivalents fades as we move from Gummere, through Tolkien, and towards Heaney. The first noticeable variation is the rendering of "eaxl-gestealla". Gummere goes for a more literal "shoulder-comrade", while Tolkien and Heaney interpret that as a "right-hand man", someone indispensable for Hrothgar's rule. Furthermore, Æscere is spelt differently; Tolkien decided to leave the original spelling intact, while both Heaney and Gummere adapt it to modern spelling conventions. Also of note is the treatment of "min run-wita ond min ræd bora". All three authors agree that Æscere's position was that of an advisor or councillor, but Heaney also stresses his friendly demeanour toward Hrothgar, who though him a "soul-mate". Though this point is clarified in one of the following lines, Heaney heavily stresses the social bond between Hrothgar and Æscere. The final point of difference is marked by the different tone taken to translate the last line, the gnome. Gummere and Tolkien both present the gnomic passage as a proclamation of sorts, while Heaney's rendition has common speech undertones. There is nothing grand about it; it does not urge men to greatness nor does it celebrate a loyal thane's noble deeds. Heaney's line seems more similar to a speech at a funeral.

[45] Gummere, line 1323; Chapter 20, p. 81
[46] Tolkien, line 1106, p. 98
[47] Heaney, line 1323, p. 93

Heaney and Gummere point out Æscere's status and describe him in terms of his position within the Danish society (sage adviser and stay in council, soul-mate to me (Hrothgar, a true mentor), while Tolkien stresses his intellectual qualities (counsels, wisdom).

Gummere assigns titles to the noble warriors to curious effect. On the one hand, his tendency to preserve the Anglo-Saxon legacy by using Modern English words of Germanic descent, the Modern English wordstock that was retained from Old English can be applauded. On the other hand, as Tolkien himself later pointed out, a part of this wordstock no longer has the same effect on the modern reader as the meanings of such words changed slightly in some cases, and significantly in other cases. We have discussed the social hierarchy of the Anglo-Saxons in one of the introductory chapters and seen that it was based on ties of lordship between social classes. This is important to consider for translation because the translator poet might employ some of the historical terms used to describe said social hierarchy, but in doing so would risk the reader not recognising the exact position in the society of the person described by such terms. One solution is, therefore, to use Modern English terms instead; words with which the reader might be better acquainted, such as "prince", "lord" (whose meaning changed over time, but can still serve us well in painting the picture of a vassal bond between the ruler and his subjects) "king", "queen", "sovran" (spelt "sovereign" in Modern English, though for the English of Gummere's contemporaries this was not an outlandish variant), and the simple "noble", among others.

Gummere uses a mix of terms familiar to the modern reader and some archaic historical terms. "Prince", "king", "queen", and "lord" are all used throughout the poem and the reader can readily identify the core meaning of such terms as they are well attested and adapted to Modern English. However, some terms, such as "atheling", seem to be adaptations from Old English nouns. Indeed, the (*Oxford Online Dictionary*) states that "atheling" is a historical term for a prince or lord in Anglo-Saxon England. This word is relegated to historical terminology in Modern English; it describes a precise socio-political position during a specific time in history. While the term is technically accurate and carries strong connotations to the Anglo-Saxon period, one could argue that it feels out of place in Modern English poetry. Though it may be an established historical word for a nobleman, it is questionable whether its meaning would be fully understood by Modern English readers. However, "atheling" complements Gummere's crafty alliterative scheme well, which is one of the main strengths of Gummere's translation. The structure of the alliterative verse seems to have been the main consideration for Gummere's choosing of particular words in general.

Gummere also uses particular terms to refer to the servants and warriors of the higher-ranked nobles, though some are rather odd. For example, it is doubtful whether "henchmen", while thematically fitting, is the optimal choice. "Henchman" is a term for a squire or page of honour to a person of rank. It could be interpreted as more of a historical term than an aesthetically pleasing word. Despite the etymology of "henchman", [48]it has acquired negative connotations in Modern English making it potentially unfit for use in the context required by the poem. Gummere's use of the word is understandable as he was trying to evoke that archaic aura that pervades *Beowulf,* but it may not work as well for the modern reader. "Comrades" is another thematically fitting word with underlying archaic aura for the time of Gummere's contemporaries which does not carry its weight over well enough into Modern English.

One important thing to note about the language of *Beowulf* is the fact that powerful emotions are often associated with boiling water or heat in some sense. Take, for instance, Gummere's line: "ireful he strode; there streamed from his eyes fearful flashes, like flame to see." Such expression is in line with the Old English tendency to describe powerful emotions as boiling. One could imagine Grendel was so furious as to begin boiling from inside so intensely that flames burst from his eye sockets, creating a powerful poetic image of strong emotion. Interestingly, the hall, Heorot, is described as being quite sturdy and resistant to force, but is doomed to fall in fire. It is not, however, the fire of Grendel's ire but literal blaze resulting from a future blood feud. Grendel's fiery fury manifests itself in his blood as the bloodied mere where he retreated after being defeated at Heorot is described as boiling. Grendel's mother's blood also has aggressive properties because it melts the sword Hrunting, lent to Beowulf by Unferth. "Boiling with wrath was the barrow's keeper" Gummere writes about the dragon's rage. This rage manifests itself literally in the fire that the dragon breathes. In comparison, Heaney does not only references literal fire, not emotional. ("so the guardian of the mound the hoard-watcher, waited for the gloaming with fierce impatience; his pent up fury at the loss of the vessel made him long to hit back and lash out in flames." lines 2302-2306) He does refer to the dragon as "hot" in line 2296, which would probably refer to its emotions rather than it being literally hot, though both are possible. Tolkien at the same line describes the dragon as "Burning, woeful at heart", but does not reference emotional flames in the following lines "Then was the keeper of the barrow swollen with wrath, purposing, fell beast, with fire to avenge his precious drinking-vessel." Gummere refers to both, the literal

[48] From Old English *hengest* " male horse", + *man* "man". (*Oxford Online Dictionary*)

flames and the emotional fire of the dragon. The emotional fire can be seen as fuel for the literal flames.

Some passages further, the poet describes Heorot as "seared with crime" in the aftermath of Grendel's rampage, which further reinforces the tendency to associate strong emotion with fire. Especially notable is the continued use of the fiery imagery to describe Grendel and his deeds or behaviour.

However, one great fault of Gummere's translation is that he wrongly interpreted some passages. Gummere makes a mistake in interpreting the battle of Finnsburgh episode. In line 1142[49] Gummere writes how "he", which from the context we can infer to mean Hengest, "escaped not the common doom"; or died. The false translation continues in the following lines. He writes how "Hun with Lafing, the light of battle, best of blades, his bosom pierced". Firstly, the –ing in 'Hunlafing' is most likely a patronymic suffix, [50]so Hunlaf's son would be the correct rendering of Hunlafing. Secondly, Gummere seems to have interpreted Lafing to be the name of the sword with which a person named Hun stabs him in the chest. This cannot be interpreted in such a way because in the same and following line we see the pattern used for enumeration of adjectives, appositions, metaphors and kennings referring to the same object. The aforementioned are usually syntactically separated so as to constitute autonomous phrases. For example, the controversial line in its original goes "þonne him Hunlafing hilde-leoman, billa selest, on bearm dyde. The first line (þonne – hilde-leoman), is uninterrupted, while "hilde-leoman" (battle-light) and "billa selest" (best of blades) are separated and clearly refer to the same object. Therefore, the subject in this sentence is Hunlaf's son, the direct object is the "hilde-leoman" also known as "billa selest" and the indirect object is "him", which refers to Hengest, the "guest" at Finn's stronghold. Thirdly, the original Old English passage does not say how Hengest got stabbed with the sword by Hun, but that the person placed it into his lap as a way of enticing and encouraging him to take action. Fourthly, Gummere writes that the sword was "famed with the Frisian earls", whereas the original poem refers to "eotenum", which means the Jutes. The sword owes its fame to being the weapon with which many Jutes had been killed, but the question remains why that would be relevant for this context. The answer lies in some of the preceding lines where Hildeburh weeps for her brother's and her son's deaths at the hands of the Jutes. This all but confirms that the Jutes were somehow involved in the conflict and the Jutes responsible for these deaths would

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[50] Though other interpretations exist, this is the more likely option since the sentence requires an agent in the part where this word stands. "On bearm dyde" is the following line. The dyde is the preterit form of the verb *don*, which can mean "put", "give", "place" (*A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*).

probably have made prime targets for the Danes' revenge. It is also known that Finn, a Frisian, held a stronghold outside of Frisia as well as within, which would be the stronghold where at least some of the Jutes under Finn's control were. Perhaps this is why Gummere decides to point out that the sword was known to the Frisian earls who had come to know of the sword through the slaughter of their subjects. The fame would only have reached the Frisians indirectly though, as the Jutes were its real victims. All things considered, it is therefore more precise to indicate that the sword was known to the Jutes, not to the Frisians. The Frisians help with the alliteration in the line, but Gummere sacrifices too much clarity and punctuality for this to be an efficient choice.

Another mistake Gummere makes is that he attributes the "unstable spirit" to Finn, rather than to Hengest. He writes that "Finn's wavering spirit bode not in breast". This is a most vivid description of someone's death, but the original lines bespeak an unstable or restless spirit that could not be restrained in the breast. Compare this with Tolkien's translation: "the restless spirit within the breast might not be restrained". Though Gummere's line is fine from an aesthetic point of view, it does not translate well the intent in the original poem's line nor does it fit at this particular place. Perhaps such an image would better be evoked later when the slaughter had ended. This placement of such a line gives the impression that Finn was already dying when the Danes' revenge came for him, which is not the case.

6.1.1.1 Eoten, ettin, ent, giant, wight, creature, monster?

There is a particularly interesting set of words when it comes to Gummere's translation, but the other poets' renditions of the same term will be mentioned for comparison.

Gummere explains the word "ettin" which he used to gloss *eoten*, which essentially means "giant". Curious choice of the word, but it fits well both in the alliterative scheme and thematically, while also being a cognate of the Anglo-Saxon word used by the *Beowulf* poet. However, when he talks about the blade Beowulf finds in the mere of Grendel's mother, he translates *Eotenas* (of the *Eotens*) with *Eotens*, not with *ettins*. By comparison, Tolkien mentions a "blade gigantic, old", referencing its size and age, while Heaney merely states that it was "from the days of the giants". *Eotenas* most definitely refers to the same creature or group as the previously used *eoten*, so Gummere's choice is slightly odd and inconsistent. The fact that he spelt *Eotenas* with a capital E might suggest he thought of *Eotens* referred to here and the previously mentioned *eoten* as belonging to different groups. Perhaps he thought *Eotens* might be an ancient tribe or an entirely different kind of creature than the *eoten* from before. The only confusion one might have about the term *Eotenas* is whether it refers to Jutes

[51]or giants, as it is used in the same form to refer to both in *Beowulf*. However, the context and the lines that follow help us clarify that the word in this instance refers to giants. The original phrase went *eald-sweord eotenisc*, and was translated as "old-sword of *Eotens*" in Gummere. The adjective *eotenisc* is glossed as "gigantic" in the *Concise Anglo-Saxon dictionary*, but the meaning of the word extends further. For example, the Bossworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon dictionary states that *eotenisc* can mean "belonging to…" or "made by a Giant, giganteous" (Joseph Bosworth 257). A derivative (perhaps a corrupted version) of the word, *entisc*, is also attested later in the poem (in line 2979). Therefore, the Old English phrase could mean "gigantic", or "made by the giants". The latter interpretation makes more sense since if giants did forge blades, they would not likely make one unfit for their size and strength, which would mean that the blade is both giant-made and giant-sized. The same blade is later clarified to definitely be giant-sized; "yet a sword the Sovran of Men vouchsafed me to spy on the wall there, in splendour hanging, old, gigantic" (1661-3, the original says "*eald-sweord eacen*", meaning "great old sword". But the allusion that *eotenisc* also means "being crafted by giants" cannot be swept aside. Indeed, the sword is described as "giant-wrought" when Beowulf hands Hrothgar its hilt ("*enta ær-geweorc*", line 1679). We also encounter a similar phrase, probably a result of formulaic language, in line 2774, used to describe the dragon's barrow, and Gummere sticks to this formulation; "old work of giants". The plural genitive form *enta* tells us that it is not an adjective that is being used to describe it, but a noun in the genitive case denoting origin, "of the ents" (or "ettins") rather than "ettinish" (*eotenisc*, giant). We see a progressively detailed description of the sword. Gummere starts by merely stating that the sword belongs to *Eotenas* and was linked with them. Then it is revealed that the sword is gigantic in size and that no ordinary man could wield it. Finally, after the sword's blade had already melted in Grendel's mother's blood, Beowulf hands its hilt to Hrothgar, and we find out that it was giant-wrought. This device of progressive revelation of details or different points of view of the same thing or event permeates the original poem and is therefore quite fitting for use in a translation of the poem. However, the term *Eotenas* is still problematic. Gummere had the right idea of a sword "of the giants" but the inconsistency in applying the term "ettin" renders his choice of words suboptimal. A solution would have been to reconcile the use of "ettin" or "Eotenas", respectively. Either

[51] A germanic tribe based in the Jutland peninsula (part of modern-day Denmark connected to the European mainland) after whom said peninsula was named.

would have served the purpose but it remains unclear as to why Gummere did not simply repeat "ettin[52]" the second time since it is most fitting to the poem.

Interestingly, we see here the formulaic language used by the *Beowulf* poet as he writes that the sword was "*eald-sweord eotenisc*" and "*eald-sweord eacen*." The formulaic framework set up by the Beowulf poet is completely lost in Gummere's translation and neither is it present in Tolkien's and Heaney's translations.

Gummere also translated "eald-sweord eotenisc" in line 2616 in the same way he did previously; "old sword of Eotens". This makes it compatible with some previous choices and adds to the count of formulaic expressions, but these are still limited to repeating identical phrases without variation. As we have seen on the example of "*eald-sweord eotenisc*" and "*eald-sweord eacen*", the Beowulf poet's formulaic language is less rigid and allows for variation of equivalents. Words in the phrase that is repeated can be substituted for other words containing the same number of syllables and begin with the same consonant if it is required by the alliterative scheme. This can at times change; for example, the number of syllables might slightly vary to allow for better balance of the two constituent half-lines. In Gummere, we only see repetition of the exact phrase rather than more creative use thereof. Heaney translated this expression as "that relic of the giants", while Tolkien goes for a merely descriptive "old gigantic sword". Heaney's translation makes sense and fits since he had introduced the sword beforehand, while Tolkien's solution is rather bland and does not carry the same weight as either "that relic of the giants" or "old-sword of the Eotens". Though we encounter the same problem with the term "Eotens", Gummere's translation is still more evocative of the origin of the sword than Tolkien's translation might suggest. In other passages where Tolkien describes the giant swords he always uses the same adjectives; old, gigantic, which are both vividly descriptive but lacing in connotation. Heaney, though not overtly expressive, does capture some of the essence of what *eotenisc* might mean by using phrases such as "that relic of the giants" and "a weapon made for giants."

What the use of the term *eotenisc* might imply is that there is a number of giant-wrought swords that are relics of a bygone age. Heroes come upon these by chance and then they change hands multiple times before finally coming into the possession of the characters in the poem. It is no mere coincidence that the swords described by the same expressions are both used in the fights against monsters. Beowulf uses the one he finds in the monster mere to slay Grendel, while Wiglaf uses his "ettinish heirloom" to help Beowulf in his fight against

[52] According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the word is extinct since the 16th century and is an old word for "a giant", and is cognate with the Old English *eoten*.

the dragon. Moreover, monsters being impervious to mere mortal iron or steel swords is consistent with such descriptions. They must be defeated by special swords or other unconventional means. In fact, it is explicitly stated that "'Twas granted him (to Beowulf) not that ever the edge of iron at all could help him at strife: too strong was his hand, so the tale is told, and he tried too far with strength of stroke all swords he wielded, though sturdy their steel: they steaded him nought."

Gummere also describes Grendel as a "wight". "Wight" is in a literary sense a spirit or a ghost. The Old English version of the poem has *wiht* in the corresponding line, which refers to Grendel. This is a false gloss because of the change in meaning of the word. While "wight" is a cognate of *wiht*, the latter simply meant "creature" in Old English. The word is accompanied by "unhallowed", and *unhælo* in Gummere and the original, respectively. This is another false gloss as the Bosworth-Toller has *unhæl* translated as misfortunate or misshapen, which does not fully correspond to "unhallowed", meaning unholy or wicked. However, one could look over the false translation as the effect produced by the translation and the original are similar. The connotation of an unholy creature that "wight" brings forth fits well into the context of the poem, though it may side-track from the human-like description of Grendel in the Old English version of the poem. All in all, though one should heed Tolkien's warning against indiscriminate use of the Modern English equivalents to Old English words one might find in the poem, in this case such use is justified. Even in other lines of the original poem, the monster Grendel is at times described as an evil or wicked spirit, which the word "wight" fully captures. At this point in the poem the Old English *wiht* does not carry any significant allusions as to the nature or the emotional impact of the poem, but it is expressed in the surrounding text (e.g. with *unhælo*). Interestingly, in line 1664, "wight" is used to describe a generic friendless man (*winigea leasum*) whom the Lord helps ("How oft He guides the friendless wight" (Gummere 98)) Gummere himself must have realised that *wiht* in Old English referred to any creature, and could, therefore be used even for humans. This may be why he used the Modern English cognate "wight" to talk about a friendless man, an exile. Grendel and his kin are also described as exiled from the lord's kingdom, so there is a parallel to draw between an actual human exile and Grendel, a supposedly monstrous exile, but with the same origin as the man. Tolkien and Heaney do not make use of the word "wight" in this case. They translate this expression more literally, as "those bereft of friends", and the "unbefriended", respectively.

The following lines on the other hand demonstrate a misuse of the word "wight": "Such wealth of gold, booty from barrow, can burden with pride each human wight: let him

hide it who will!". Here, wight is used in the sense "creature", as was the original meaning of the Old English "with". However, this an anachronism since "wight" in Modern English only refers to spirits. One could make the argument that the archaic use of the word might fit here since the original poem is ripe with archaic references and expressions but we would need to determine if this word was indeed archaic in Gummere's time.

Another creature word to consider is "nicors". Gummere retains "nicors" from the original poem, which is a problematic term because it is too specific for reference. Tolkien's term "water-demons" works much better in comparison because this expression is both easier to understand while retaining the imagery and the connotations of the noun in the original poem.

Other creature imagery is employed to great effect. Take, for instance, the following lines into consideration; "So slumbered the stout-heart. Stately the hall rose gabled and hilt where the gust slept on till a raven black the rapture-of–heaven blithe-heart boded. Bright came flying shine after shadow. (the swordsmen hasted…)" This passage was translated most favourably. Note how Gummere keeps to the theme of flight and height by first describing the hall's towering size, then changing the focus to the black raven, a flying bird, only for the shine to "come flying". Notice also the in-line alliteration of "shine after shadow", which not only beautifully binds the two opposites, but also represents a common speech pattern in Old English inherited from oral rhetoric. The two-stress phrases, such as o*n dæge, and after dæge*, *to habbane and to sellanne*, *on wuda and on felde*, etc. were very common even in administrative use but was popularised by oral parley. For example, The two-stress phrase is the essential the building block of the Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, as clarified by Tolkien. (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 25)

When the dragon is awakened and angered by the thief stealing from his hoard, Gummere writes that "the warden's wrath prince and people must pay betimes!" The poem in Old English merely states that the people of those lands would soon discover that the dragon had been angered, but Gummere transforms these lines into a message with gnomic undertones, as if the sequence of events is self-evident. This also intensifies the warning implied, and Gummere even foreshadows a hefty price the prince and the people will pay for disturbing the dragon, which is not mentioned in the original poem[53], nor is it present in Heaney's [54]and Tolkien[55]'s translations. The ultimate price the prince and the people must pay

[53] "þæt sie ðiod onfand, bu-folc beorna, þæt he gebolgen wæs." lines 2219-2220
[54] "As the people of that country would soon discover", line 2220
[55] "This the people learned, men of the neighbouring folk, that he was wroth indeed." Line 1865-1868

is suffering destruction at the hands of the dragon but also, ultimately, Beowulf's death, which arrives betimes (prematurely).

6.1.1.2 Modern English cognates of Old English words

As we have previously discussed, caution should be exercised when translating Old English words with their Modern English cognates as the meaning of many words has changed. However, this is not true for all such words, and in cases where the Modern English cognate of an Old English word has retained its general meaning, it can be preferable to certain alternatives because it makes the translation stay true to the spirit of the poem. Additionally, the simplicity of choice further impels such solutions. Though Gummere sometimes errs on the side of choosing Modern English cognates whose name has changed throughout the history of English, in other cases he does the original poem justice.

For example, Gummere can be justified in is his use of "unblithe". The meaning has remained the same throughout the history of English, though in modern times the negative prefix un- has been dropped more often than not. Still, the root which carries the meaning remains in use and can be used to form a word of opposite meaning. Interestingly, the word seems to alliterate on the first syllable, not on the second where the stress should come if we are to assume the same rules for this particular word as are applied to other words formed with the prefix un-.

"Brand" is another literary word used quite often by Gummere to mean "sword". The word is also used in the Old English poem so it represents a nice transition from the Old English into Modern English. It helps in his alliterative schemes and brings about an aura of archaicness to his translation.

"Mickle errand" as a translation for *micel ærende* also works since the meanings of words have stayed the same. Again, we see Gummere's tendency to keep his expression as close to the original poem as possible.

Interestingly, Gummere (and the *Beowulf* poet) refer to Beowulf's shield as a "board", even though it is earlier said that Beowulf had an iron shield crafted for him since a wooden shield would not stand the fire of the dragon's breath. Tolkien and Heaney both use the more generic "shield".

6.1.2 Syntax

Gummere also often breaks the syntax to fit the verse structure into the alliterative pattern required by the Old English metre that he is trying to emulate. However, this is easier to follow than Tolkien's version, which might strike one as odd given that Tolkien's translation is in prose while that of Gummere is in verse. This is because Gummere keeps the phrase structure intact while only (or mostly) shuffling the syntactic order of the parts of the sentence. This is also what happens in the original poem in Old English, and is enabled by the more flexible word order in Old English. For example, Gummere writes:

"They were easy to find who elsewhere sought
in room remote their rest at night,
bed in the bowers, when that bale was shown,
was seen in sooth, with surest token, —
the hall-thane's hate."

If these lines were to be rewritten with the standard syntactic order in mind, they might be arranged thus: "Those who elsewhere sought their rest at night in remote rooms, in beds in the bowers were easy to find when that bale was shown with surest token, when the hall-thane's hate was seen in sooth."

Notice how the noun and verb phrases, complements, and other parts of syntax are all grouped together. These phrases mostly correspond to the half-lines and remain intact after syntactic reordering. Only the whole phrases change positions within the sentence, they are not cleft or split and their constituents are not inserted into other phrases which might cause confusion. This is the thing that can cause the reading of the poem to have a "marching" pace to it. This is further enhanced by the use of diacritics and conjunctions, which help divide half-lines (and therefore phrases) by providing clear pauses. One can read the poem half-line by half-line, discovering individual ideas expressed by each half-line. Upon reading several such half-lines ideas crystallise and finally coalesce into a full thought.

However, Gummere sometimes rearranges the syntax even further than what the *Beowulf* poet's had done in the original poem. For example, when describing Hrothgar's ultimate fate, Gummere writes;

" 'twas a lord unpeered
Every way blameless, till age had broken
-it spareth no mortal – his splendid might"

Note how he breaks up the syntax of the second and the third line. A normal ordering would yield a sentence like: "Every way blameless, till age had broken his splendid might, as it spareth no mortal." Indeed, this is the order in the original poem in Old English:

"þæt wæs an cyning
Æghwæs orleahtre, oþþæt hine yldo benam
Mægenes wynnum se oft mangeum scod."

One reason might be to postpone the object of the sentence in a dramatic way so that the effect of his might waning is stronger on the reader. The other consequence of such a syntactic order is that there can be no dispute about the referent of the pronoun "it". If he had chosen the former variant, "it" might refer to "age" or "might", though it would probably also be interpreted correctly as age having spared no mortal. Still, this is a fine solution.

6.1.3 Names

For the most part, Gummere retains the original names as they are found in the Old English version of the poem. He does not modernise the spellings nor does he make any other emendations to the names. For example, Gummere retains the original name of *Scyld*'s son *Beowulf*, rather than changing it into *Beow*, as was done later by Tolkien and then Heaney. However, the name is annotated to indicate that this is not in fact Beowulf the Geat, the hero of the poem, but a different Beowulf. Though it is clear from the context that this is not the Beowulf of the poem, the retention of the same name causes confusion. Tolkien later explained that we can trace the genealogy of the Danish founding house, and that the name stated here should be "Beow" *(Tolkien, Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell*). He believes this to be an error of a scribe, not the original poet's intention.

Some adaptation is present in names such as "Scandian lands", used to refer to *Scedeland* from the original. The stress falls on the same syllable and both alliterate with *Scyld* from the previous line (note also how *Scyld* is even transformed into "Shield" in Heaney, but not in Tolkien and Gummere). Gummere could have gone for "Scandinavia" but the he needed to have an additional stressed syllable in the half-line. The same words would not alliterate in the contemporary idiom of Old English when this poem was written down, but we recall that the [sk], [sc], and [sh] consonant clusters can all alliterate in Old English poetry. Another potential explanation for the alliteration is the principle of archaic speech. We have already discussed how the *Beowulf* poet uses archaic spelling conventions in the first line (*Gar-Dena* and *geardagum* alliterate but shouldn't according to the spelling and

pronunciation conventions of the time). In Old English, words spelt with an initial [sc] consonant cluster would have been read aloud as Modern English [sh] (c.f. Scyld, shield). The later influence of Old Norse brought into Old English a stock of words beginning with [sc] which would have been read aloud as /sk/ (c.f. the Anglo-Saxon shirt, and the Norse word skirt). Therefore, even the intentional archaic spelling conventions account for possible objections to the irregular alliteration in the original. However this is no longer distinguishable in Modern English, and cannot explain such deviations. Conclusively, "Scyld" and "Scandian lands" cannot alliterate. Another peculiar case of attempted alliteration is to be considered: "loving clansmen, as late he charged them" /k/ vs /tsch/, these two words cannot alliterate, though they start with the same initial letter. In this case, neither of the two explanations can justify such a choice of words if the alliterative scheme is to be retained.

Gummere uses annotations to explain some names, many of which are not adapted or modernised, like *Heorot*[56], but not to explain any other that might carry even more significance to the poem. It matters not if the reader does or does not know what *Heorot* means as the "hart" was mostly just a royal symbol for the Iron Age Germanic peoples. Other names, like *Sigemund*, which add additional depth to the interpretation, even if just evocative of Beowulf's previous exploit, would be more useful to explain, and Gummere does not elaborate on the details of such names. Also, any names which the modern reader might have trouble pronouncing would be better served with an annotation to try and help with this.

Next we turn to a class of abstract nouns which were personalised by the poet. Gummere turns the Old English word *hild*, meaning "battle", which only remained productive in women's personal names, into a personification of battle. *Hild* would have been a recognisable word to the Anglo-Saxon readers, but it would not have been a part of a common speech, since by the time of the presumed composition of *Beowulf* it was only retained in women's names and poetry. This is a fine interpretation which presents a very powerful image, which can perhaps be likened to an image of a Valkyrie taking the fallen warrior into *Woden's* hall as "battle" is given agency through the use of an action verb.[57] It also ties in further with the concept of the inevitable fate, the *Wyrd*, as it was understood by the Anglo-Saxons. Should Beowulf's fate be that he die in battle, this is not something which he can affect. He might still try his best not to succumb to such doom, but it is ultimately not his decision. *Wyrd* might decree that *Hild* take him (possibly to *Woden* himself).

[56] Meaning "hart" or "stag".

[57] To Hygelac send, if Hild should take me, best of war-weeds, warding my breast, armor excellent, heirloom of Hrethel and work of Wayland.

"Fares Wyrd as she must" is the line where the personification of fate or Destiny is introduced. Gummere annotates that Wyrd is a "mighty power whom the Christian poet can still revere". The significant element that gives away the personification is the female personal pronoun "she". There are two possibilities here: either Gummere simply copied the reference to *Wyrd* in the feminine form from the Old English poem, or he has intentionally kept it there for the specific purpose of personification. The latter is more likely as it goes in line with other personifications in the poem (see also *Hild*, the personification of battle).

"Wyrd oft saveth earl undoomed if he doughty be!", "But Wyrd forbade him to seize any more of men on earth after that evening.", "Forced of fate, he shall find his way to the refuge ready for race of man (…)","Wyrd o'erwhelmed him", and "Wyrd full nigh stood ready to greet the gray-haired man, to seize his soul-hoard, sunder apart life and body." are some of the passages in Gummere's translation where the poet shows *Wyrd*, or Fate, as having agency. However, in: "(…) and fain of them more had killed, had not wisest God their *Wyrd* averted, and the man's brave mood" a conflicting idea for the *Wyrd* emerges. So far *Wyrd* acted independently, but it is now simply referred to as "destiny", which the Christian god can control. The Christian God is thus the supreme power, one above all other agents present in the poem. *Wyrd* may yet be an agent itself, but it is still subordinated to the will of the Christian god. Moreover, in the following line it is described how the "brave man's (meaning Beowulf's) brave mood" can also avert the *Wyrd*, which could imply that a man can, after all affect his fate. We need to keep in mind that Beowulf is an extraordinary man, possessing the strength of thirty men and performing deeds unimaginable to commoners. However, a further line hints that any man can strive to avert the workings of Fate: "*Wyrd* oft saveth earl undoomed if he doughty be". The warrior can therefore prove himself to *Wyrd* and be seen as worthy in its (her) eyes, such that it (she) spares him. This is the most likely relation between the warrior and the *Wyrd*, and though the warrior may influence the *Wyrd* by proving himself, *Wyrd* still retains the power of the final judgement. Still, such use of *Wyrd* may be odd, as it is inconsistent with the previously established descriptions which indicate that it has agency, while in this line it is simplified to the abstract noun meaning "destiny" or "fate", as opposed to the agency with which it was described earlier. This treatment of *Wyrd* also attests to the degree of control the characters have over the outcomes of their actions. *Wyrd* is at the same time inevitable and malleable, so the sense of doom that *Wyrd* carries with it is somewhat curbed by the indomitable will of the Germanic warrior.

"*Wyrd* knew they not, destiny dire, and the doom to be seen by many an earl when eve should come, and Hrothgar homeward hasten away, royal, to rest." In this passage *Wyrd* is

directly referred to as destiny in a classic formula of stating the name for something or someone and following it up with a short description, perhaps a kenning. "Atheling brave, he was fated to finish this fleeting life, his days on earth, and the dragon with him, though long it had watched o'er the wealth of the hoard!" - here fate is simply referred to as destiny through the use of lowercase initial letter. Tolkien and the original poem do not use "fate", while Heaney explicitly references destiny.

One final look at the nature of *Wyrd* will be examined through these lines; "One fight shall end our war by the wall, as *Wyrd* allots, all mankind's master." [58](*swa unc wyrd geteoð Metod manna gehwæs*), "Will turn out as fate, overseer of men, decides"[59], and "even as Fate, the Portion of each man, decrees to us." [60] The interpretation of Fate is rendered difficult by these lines. On the one hand, we have established by now that Fate is an independent agent, whose goals often clash with those of the Christian God. On the other hand, Fate is clearly subordinate to the Christian God in some instance. What is definitely clear is that Fate is above men; it (she) can decree the destiny of men. Warriors may strive to avert her workings and find solace in the resistance, but she will ultimately prevail in some form. She is therefore definitely more powerful than men, but possibly less powerful the God himself.

The problem arises from the use of the word *metod* in the original poem. Firstly, *Metod* is most often used to refer to, or is in some ways connected with the Christian God. Secondly, the Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon dictionary states that *metod* is a poetic word whose meaning in heathen times may have been fate, destiny, etc. Thirdly, it is also used for Deities; not only for the Christian God, but also for the pagan gods, as was the old Saxon word *metod*, and the Icelandic cognate *mjötuðr*. So the word seems to have gone through a transformation of meaning, and we need to determine which meaning seems most likely for the Beowulf poet to use.

We can say with almost utter certainty that the second meaning, "destiny" or "fate" is the safest to assert. However, whether the word has connotations beyond the meaning of the abstract noun is up for debate. The first and the third meaning are possible since we have shown the *Beowulf* poet's tendency to use archaic words. So too may he have intended for *Metod* to be interpreted with archaic undertones. However, the first meaning does not fit since the *Beowulf* poet introduces *Wyrd* and *Metod* in the same sentence. While consecutive phrases with the same referent are not uncommon in *Beowulf*, such use does not fit in this case

[58] Gummere, Chapter 33, p. 144
[59] Heaney, line 2526, p. 171
[60] Tolkien, line 2123-2124, p. 162

because the two words are the primary designators. Usually, multiple phrases with the same referent reveal additional information about the referent and help in the construction of the alliterative patterns. These can also be classified as subordinate to the main reference, or the proper name of the person or object. But both *Metod* and *Wyrd* are proper names which refer to the same thing. This is probably how Tolkien interpreted these lines, since he used "Fate, Portion of each man" as his translation of choice. "Portion" is an archaic word for destiny, which means the same as *Wyrd*, or fate, etc. Therefore, Tolkien translated *wyrd* as "Fate" and used "Portion", a synonym for "fate", to translate *metod*.

The notion of *Metod* as deity is possible, both in reference to the Christian God, since the Beowulf poet is a Christian, and to the pagan deities, since we have seen how *Wyrd* itself is independent. The meaning of *Metod* as the Christian God makes *Wyrd* and God one and the same, which is inconsistent with previously established lore. *Wyrd* and God can at times clash, and God cannot be at odds with his own deeds. This would make him twofold and not a unified, single deity, and would go against Christian belief. The last meaning of *Wyrd* as a pagan deity remains, but the translator needs to be mindful of how to best convey the intended meaning. The Beowulf poet did not use this word by chance, especially since *metod* in his time was most probably only used in association with the Christian God. This would not work as smoothly in *Beowulf* however, due to the inconsistencies pointed out beforehand. So *Wyrd* cannot be the Christian God, but can be the result of his will in certain situations. It most likely is not a heathen God, but the expression retains a token of heathenness that evokes the past beliefs of the pagan Anglo-Saxons. Tolkien, however, warns against this potential interpretation. He argues that "Expressions involving *Fate, Fortune,* etc. are at all times liable to become formulæ, the content of which has evaporated. Off-hand you cannot, if a man says "fortune favours the brave", from that deduce his temper of mind, his beliefs or philosophy, if he has any, nor whether he would write *fortune* with a capital F, and has, even as a fancy, any imagination of a "person" existing independently of himself and his inherited phrases, turning a wheel up or down in fits of caprice." (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 390). But given the *Beowulf* poet's way of constructing the poem, it is unlikely that so many figures of speech would have been inserted unintentionally. Furthermore, even if by the time of the *Beowulf* poet the expressions had indeed become but figures of speech with no further explicit allusions to the heathen belief, there is still an echo of that pagan mythic heritage inherent in the very history of *wyrd*. The main characters in the poem are also pagans, and it is possible that the *Beowulf* poet had intended the *wyrd* to be interpreted ambiguously. This was noticed by Gummere and Heaney. Gummere, perhaps

realising the parallel between Wyrd and God, formed a type of kenning for Wyrd based on the model of his kennings for God and wrote "all mankind's master" (c.f. his kenning for God "Sovran-of-Men", while Heaney translated *metod* as "overseer of men," much similar in effect though more down-to-earth and common an expression, as is usual for Heaney. Gummere's solution is, therefore, probably the most effective solution which conveys the most of what the *Beowulf* poet intended to express. "Wyrd denied it, and victory's honours."

Though Gummere came up with great translations of names, it is curious to note how inconsistent he was when it came to translating, or modernising and adapting names. Compare *Hrefnawudu*, which was modernised into "Ravenswood", *Earnanæs*, Cliff-of-Eagles, and *Biowulfes Biorh*, "Beowulf's Barrow", with *Hreosnabeorh, Weders, Herebeald, Nægling*, and numerous others which were left as they appear in the original. Even if we only consider place names, Gummere still inconsistently translates and adapts the original names into Modern English. The original name is made of two constituents linked by a hyphen as it is given in Heaney's bilingual edition of *Beowulf* (Heaney). This might imply that that was not the true name for the place where the battle was fought. Instead, it might have been some wood nearby another place name which was named after ravens, so this wood would then be named similarly by association with that place. Old English place names were often chosen due to a prominent natural or surrounding geographical feature, so this possibility is not out of the question.

However, (Kevin Kiernan) shows that both in the Old English Cotton Vitellius Manuscript and in the transliteration the names *Hrefnesholt* and *Hrefnawudu* are spelt as one word. In addition, there exists a real place in today's Sweden called "Ramshult", which may correspond to the *Hrefnesholt* mentioned in *Beowulf*, particularly due to the presence of a hill fort, also mentioned in *Beowulf* when the poet is describing the second war between the Geats and the Swedes. Ravenswood is therefore a clean and efficient translation that is supported by all historical, cultural, legendary, and linguistic arguments. However, the question about Gummere's inconsistency in rendering Old English names into Modern English remains open.

6.1.4 Kennings

Gummere resorts to annotations to explain some kennings which could be misunderstood by the reader. It seems that modern translations can rarely do without this sort of modern formatting and aid to the reader if only for the fear of being misinterpreted or unclear. It should be stated that there are no annotations and structural organisation present in the original text. The structure comes from the alliterative verse itself, and the common

speech patterns it is based upon. This is what ensured that the reader or listener would be able to follow the narrative as it proceeded as well as interpret the brooding thoughts and revel in the grand speeches of warrior-kings.

In translating *Beowulf* Gummere looks to the original poem for inspiration in the crafting of kennings. He creates kennings based on the Old English models, and many of them are calques of the expressions found in the original poem. Some are adapted to better fit the nature of Modern English, though they still closely follow the logic of the Old English phrases they are based on. Take, for instance the "shoulder comrades" kenning. We have already discussed "comrades" and its implications, but we will set those aside for the moment. The original poem contains *eaxl-gestealla*, and the kenning is used for Heremod's thanes as well as for Æscere, who was very dear to Hrothgar but died in the rampage of Grendel's mother. The kenning is literally translated on both constituents, and it is important that Gummere retains the effect of parallelism that the repetition of appositions for Heremod's thanes and Æscere brings in the original poem. Both Heremod's thanes and Æscere suffered unjustly deaths; Heremod's thanes at the hands of their own lord, while Æscere was killed by Grendel's mother, who sought to avenge her son's death by taking revenge on the Shieldings. It was Beowulf who killed Grendel however, not Æscere, so he suffers unjustly death.

When it comes to kennings for particular characters, or *Haiti* as we have previously called them, it is interesting to note how some kennings used for Hrothgar are used to describe Beowulf when he comes to rule the Geats. Some of these include: "breaker-of-rings", "folk's good shepherd" and "people's shepherd" (for Hrothgar and Beowulf, respectively), "defence-of-Scyldings" and "folk-defender" (since Beowulf is of the Geats, he cannot be "defence-of-Scyldings"), "defender-of-earls" and "earl's defence", and so on. The same parallelism is evident in kennings referring to Hrothgar's hall and Beowulf's stronghold, like; "wine-hall", and "banquet-hall" Moreover, Wiglaf is described by many of the same terms used to refer to young Beowulf in the original poem. For example, Wiglaf is described as "sage", though he is young, much like Beowulf was praised for his wisdom despite his youth by Hrothgar. Wiglaf also displays enthusiasm and courage typical of young Beowulf and encourages his lord to strive on and face the foe, as Beowulf comforted Hrothgar and urged him to take action against Grendel's mother. Of the kennings however, none remain in Gummere's translation, save some generic ones with "–thane" as their constituent and him being referred to as an earl.

We need to be mindful of any mistakes the translators may make in their translation. Gummere is no exception to this rule. Take, for instance his translation of dragon, or rather how he refers to the creature at certain points. Dragon is referred to as a worm, which is

erroneously translated from *wyrm*, meaning reptile, serpent, snake, dragon in Old English. *Worm* was the form for the insect, mite, or small creature. Though this may be an intentional choice to alliterate with 'Weals' from line A, this translation is semantically wrong. One other reason why Gummere's inclusion of "worm" over "wyrm" is suboptimal is the similarity of the form of the two words. Both have the same number of syllables and start with /w/, so they both fulfil the same spot in the alliterative scheme. Wyrm is simply a more accurate term to employ both in general and in the specific lines where it participates in the cross-caesura alliteration.[61] Other kennings for the dragon include; "Plague-of-the-people", "grim destroyer" (both often repeated for the dragon independently), "flyer-afar", "battle-flyer", "folk-destroyer". The last one is interesting since a parallel is drawn between the dragon, the "folk-destroyer" and Beowulf, the "folk-protector", which rests on the "folk" element in this kenning. Gummere establishes an opposition between the two foes by the use of parallelism in kennings. In the corresponding lines Heaney writes "bane of that people", while Tolkien says; "destroyer of the folk". In Gummere, we also find "dragon-of-earth" and "dawn-flier". The latter kenning is quite interesting since the dragon is only said to fly during night time in the poem. The original contains *uht-flogan*. *Uht* can mean twilight, dusk, early morning, dawn. (C.f. Heaney's "dawn-scorcher", and Tolkien's "old serpent in the dim light flying"). Tolkien probably comes closest to the ambiguous meaning of *uht* but his descriptive translation is unfit for verse.

We might also take a look at some place name kennings. Take for instance, "wolf-cliffs" ("highlands wolfhaunted" in Tolkien and "they dwell apart among wolves on the hills" in Heaney). These examples illustrate a greater tendency towards explanative solutions to the compact and dense meaning of Old English phrases. The Old English *wulf-hleoþu* generated Gummere's literal translation, which, though a compact and practical solution to use in alliterative verse, arguably falls short of the clarity. Tolkien's solution is quite descriptive while still retaining some of the compactness and expressing the full meaning in only two words. Heaney instead went for a Modern English phrase that feels more natural to speakers of Modern English, but lost some of the archaic tone and lofty expression characteristic of the poem in the process.

[61] See "the warrior king, as the worm now coiled" (Gummere 146); "weakened in war. So the worm found out" (Gummere, 150); "and the Weder's-helm smote that worm asunder" (Gummere 154).

6.1.5 Archaic Language

Gummere's translation of *Beowulf* is ripe with archaic expressions and phrases, even for contemporary English. His language would nowadays be considered archaic to an even greater extent. It is interesting to note just how this linguistic distance can grow. Firstly, even the *Beowulf* poet himself distanced himself from the theme, the time, the place, and the characters in the poem, creating thereby a poem about an old topic written in an archaic mode. Nowadays, the distance between the poet and the modern audience is introduced, and this is one of the hurdles to be vaulted by the translators. Gummere's version contains many of the same archaisms that we saw in Tolkien, such as archaic irregular past tense of verbs like "spake", "reft" and "wot". Moreover, Gummere also uses archaic affixes for certain categories of words. He uses "carven" instead of "carved" to indicate the passive or adjective; he inserts the prefix be- to indicate a finite action as in "besprinkled". He also uses archaic, borderline or outright obsolote vocabulary, like "sennight", meaning "one week". He also uses the archaic endings for the second and third person singular of the present tense; -est and -eth, like in "darst" or "saveth".

"Yon battle-king" is also archaic and literary, even for the contemporary English. It recurs throughout the poem not only in the poet's voice, but also in the speeches of the characters. Personal pronouns, like "Ye", occur throughout the poem as well. All of this further elevates the style of the translation and establishes that the theme of the poem, though it be centred around the man on earth, is worthy of great consideration.

6.2 Conclusion

Of the three translations considered in this work Gummere's translation is the most adherent to the principles of the Old English alliterative scheme. Though the expressions therein are often archaic, they mostly do not hinder the comprehension and the beauty of style. What stands out in Gummere's translation is the inconsistency with which Gummere treats proper nouns, as he chose to modernise a part of them, translate some into Modern English terms, like "Ravenswood", while leaving others as they appear in the original poem. This can create confusion (as he did not correct the error of the scribe by changing the Beowulf (of the Shieldings) to Beow, for example) but also difficulty in reading and pronunciation of the poem, thereby affecting the rhythm. Luckily, the names can hardly stop the marching alliterative scheme Gummere has managed to re-create using a mixture of Modern English terms and archaic vocabulary to aid his alliterative verse construction.

Conclusion – Why and how to translate *Beowulf*?

Seamus Heaney set out to translate *Beowulf* on a commission by the Norton Publishing House. However, he developed several interests in *Beowulf* along the way. Firstly, he recognised it as a part of his personal cultural identity. This is the result of his stance on translation, which he views both as matter of wider cultural responsibility ("responsibility towards the tribe" (Geremia 59)) and as a matter of personal responsibility ("responsibility towards the poet's, or translator's own freedom of expression" (Geremia 59)). Heaney is "unwilling to speak only the language of his tribe" (Geremia 60), and tends towards self-fulfilment and enrichment by translating from other cultures and languages. Translation in this regard is not to be viewed simply as a matter of equivalents transfer. Instead, the translation, especially literary translation, changes the identity of both the original work and the translator (Heaney). In this sense, Heaney gives new meaning to Beowulf through his own translation, as through his own rendition thereof, the poem will be viewed differently than through the lens of other translators. In turn, all of these differ from the original. At the same time, Heaney feels changed by the experience of translating *Beowulf*. Despite the differences between the context in which *Beowulf* was written down and the modern times, translation is necessary to bridge the gap between the past and the present culture, and this is arguably Heaney's second major reason for translation.

The world of the Anglo-Saxons differs vastly from our contemporary understanding and experience of reality, yet it constitutes a part of the history of the English people, the English language, and the English literary canon. This is where the responsibility towards the tribe comes in. In this context, it is the duty of the poet to preserve the cultural heritage not only of his own tribe, but possibly other tribes as well, as we have already pointed out how Heaney also considers the preservation of the heritage of other tribes a worthy pursuit. However it can be argued that by actively participating in the preservation of the cultural heritage of a particular tribe, one becomes connected to that tribe in some way. This means that Heaney has accepted the Anglo-Saxon heritage at the very least as part of his literary identity. One thing that links *Beowulf* to Heaney's other works are the violent themes found therein, especially sectarian violence (for example, violence among tribes in the context of *Beowulf*). This is also linked to his personal experience and to the experience of his own

native tribe, Northern Ireland, and its dual history where the Gaelic and Anglo-Saxon meet, among others (such as the Scandinavian and the Roman Catholic).

This connection to the Anglo-Saxon culture and history sparked by Heaney's encounter with the word *þolian* can also serve Heaney to "come to terms with history of Northern Ireland and its difficult relation with England's oppressive power." (Geremia 62-63), though it is ludicrous to think the two are related. Ireland has had a difficult history with England (and the United Kingdom), but a reconciliation or revenge by appropriation of the "national epic" seems at best a mockery, which cannot lead to a satisfactory outcome. We are fortunate this is not the case because Heaney is a poet and a translator, who, despite being culturally marked (as any man, writer or not, inevitably is) manages to produce an exquisite translation of *Beowulf*, all in line with the goals he has set out to do. This work transcends any national feuds, though it does send powerful messages about the violence among different groups of people in the context of inter-tribal fighting. Perhaps the reconciliation can refer to Heaney's identifying the cultural heritage of the once oppressor of his own tribe. The translation required an understanding of the Anglo-Saxon culture and language, and for Heaney that must have been an arduous task as he was no expert on the Anglo-Saxon tongue. By gaining insight into what Anglo-Saxon literature and the society that produced it looked like, he was able to better understand the oppressor's history through a narrative which evoked familiar historical struggles in the context of inter-tribal fighting. By accepting the task of translating *Beowulf* into contemporary English, Heaney has realised that one part of his identity is that he is English-speaking, and the Anglo-Saxon heritage has strengthened that part of his personality.

The difference between Anglo-Saxon and Modern English is pivotal in understanding the problematic venture of translation between these two stages of English, especially in poetry. Source-oriented or target-oriented translations are produced, and the question to pose is what the scope of the work is. For students and scholars familiar with Anglo-Saxon, a source-oriented translation is of more use and they can better appreciate it, but a target-oriented might be more suitable for the modern audience and readers unfamiliar with the Anglo-Saxon world. It needs to be pointed out that each of the modes of translation necessarily concedes some characteristic of the original and sacrifices either readability or staying true to the original.

Tolkien takes a rather different approach to translating *Beowulf* than Heaney. He opted to stay true to the original as much as possible. Tolkien was a renowned scholar of the Old English language and the literature of the Anglo-Saxons. During his tenure at Oxford, he

taught numerous courses on various elements of the Anglo-Saxon language and literature. Naturally, in many of his lectures *Beowulf* came up as the prime example of Old English poetry. The lectures given and the notes for the lectures constitute a sizeable bulk of the translation published by his son, Christopher Tolkien. These facts are quite important as they explain the very nature of J.R.R. Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf*. As a scholar, he well-versed in the Old English language, the literary conventions, but also with the particular idiom used to write *Beowulf.* Thanks to his abundant knowledge, he was able to pinpoint the elements that are pivotal in trying to make sense of *Beowulf* and was able to make the most impactful contribution to the *Beowulf* studies, or the *Beowulfiana*, (Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* 103) as he called them.

From the perspective of the language and literary convention, he pointed out the importance of the "common speech patterns" (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 26) as the base building block of the alliterative verse, and therefore the Old English poetry in general. This is quite important to understand because one of the prevailing theories in past centuries was that *Beowulf* was exclusively a product of oral tradition. While the rough outlines of *Beowulf* may have been created by the *scops* or gleemen of the oral tradition, the version of *Beowulf* that we possess today is the work of a single poet, a Christian who viewed the Germanic cultural heritage and its heroic past through the lens of Christianity. Tolkien wrote that *Beowulf* "is a poem by a learned man writing of old times, who looking back on the heroism and sorrow feels in them something permanent and something symbolical" (Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* 123). It can be asserted that the poet did not mean for this poem to be sung, but rather to be read out loud or silently, but its primary place is in writing not just because the poem is rather melancholic and it would not be overly joyous to the public, or because of the theme that it regards, or even because of its brooding nature and the lack of quick-paced narrative, but rather because of the very structure of its verse and the nature of the language used. Tolkien writes; "The lines do not go according to tune. They are founded on a balance; an opposition between two halves of roughly equivalent phonetic weight, and significant content, which are more often rhythmically contrasted than similar. They are more like masonry than music" (Tolkien, Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics 126). Tolkien suggests that *Beowulf* is therefore a carefully constructed poem, rather than one of "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings (…) recollected in tranquillity." (Wordsworth 251) The *Beowulf* poet is very deliberate in his choice of words because of the alliterative restrictions this kind of verse structure imposes. Yet, these very restrictions can generate many creative solutions which enable the *Beowulf*

poet to add additional nuance to his expression, while also accommodating for the strict rules of metrics.

Tolkien also makes an interesting comparison between *Beowulf* and sculpture; "Language and verse, of course, differ from stone or wood or paint, and can be only heard or read in a time-sequence; so that in any poem that deals at all with characters and events some narrative element must be present. We have none the less in *Beowulf* a method and structure that within the limits of the verse-kind approaches rather to sculpture painting. It is a composition not a tune" (*Tolkien, Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* 126). Interestingly, Tolkien points out that to experience any language dealing with people and happenings, there needs to be some narrative, and narrative is one of the main foundations of prose. Therefore, his own prose translation cannot be faulted on this particular principle. But, one cannot simply read *Beowulf*, record the impression and then set out to translate it. One technique of translation that is often employed is verbatim translation line by line, which does not suit Modern English well. It is therefore imperative that we keep in mind the nature of the language and how it has changed, but also how the social, cultural and historical circumstances changed; what we might perceive in *Beowulf* as scholars may not be detected by the Anglo-Saxon audience for whom this was intended. An excerpt from Tolkien's brilliant "*Beowulf: The monsters and the critics*", lauded as the most influential piece of criticism on *Beowulf* to ever have been written, will be quoted in its entirety as any paraphrasing will not do the great scholar justice; "This poem cannot be criticized or comprehended, if its original audience is imagined in like case to ourselves, possessing only *Beowulf* in splendid isolation. For Beowulf was not designed to tell the tale of Hygelac's fall, or for that matter to give the whole biography of Beowulf, still less to write the history of the Geatish kingdom and its downfall. But it used knowledge of these things for its own purpose- to give that sense of perspective, of antiquity with a greater and yet darker antiquity behind. These things are mainly on the outer edges or in the background because they belong there, if are to function in this way. But in the centre we have an heroic figure of enlarged proportions" (*Tolkien, Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* 127). This is precisely the reason for the re-invigoration and redefining of the *Beowulf* studies; Tolkien clearly points out that *Beowulf* is a piece of literature, not a historical, legal, genealogical, or even a religious text. *Beowulf* is a marvel of Old English poetry and it should be interpreted as such. It is strange indeed that before Tolkien *Beowulf* should have been praised for the historical facts it provided us with, most of which are untrue and have been warped by the poet to his own ends; or for the brilliant display of the heretic behaviour and barbarous heathenry of the pagan

Danes, Geats, and Swedes; or even for the beauty of expression, which is found in other poems of the period as well. It is the theme of *Beowulf* and the meaning with which the *Beowulf* poet infused the poem what gives *Beowulf* its literary worth. "The 'meaning' of the poet cannot be arrived at by a mere bald *literal* translation, or by warming it up with modern diction, without appreciating the idiom; and (…) we constantly need to know more than we do (tackling *Beowulf* direct and without any previous knowledge) (Tolkien, *Beowulf - A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell* 313). It is therefore with this mind-set that one should approach translating *Beowulf* should one strive for a faithful rendition thereof in alliterative verse.

However, this has proven quite difficult for the translators to implement and new translations of *Beowulf* keep appearing in an attempt to remedy the diction of the previous ones. Since 1900 an average of one *Beowulf* translation every two years has appeared. Chickering compares this abundance of *Beowulf* translations to the relative lack of translations of Homer or Dante, the renditions of which can survive in the academic context for decades before a new translation even appears, let alone takes its predecessor's place. Chickering explains this by pointing out the relative shortness of the poem compared to Homer or Dante, contained in only 3182 lines. However, he also argues that there is the "persistent genetic fallacy that mistakes the remote historical continuity between Old English and Modern English as an indication of their essential identity, when in reality a whole millennium separates the two culturally and linguistically." (Chickering 161)

In short, Chickering thinks that a problem in numerous translations of *Beowulf* that appears constantly is one of perceiving it as a part of the English cultural and linguistic identity, even though there is a large chasm between the Old English period and the Modern English period. However, this need not be viewed as problematic, as identity itself cannot remain unchanged, and the very history of the English language is reflective thereof. That being said, the Old English period undoubtedly represents a base, a foundation of the English language as it has changed over the millennium. As such, it cannot be ignored, and from the point of view of the identity of both the language and the culture, it represents a pivotal point in their history. To modern readers it may be difficult to comprehend as both the language and the culture of the Anglo-Saxon society are vastly different than their modern equivalents, but this dichotomy is still important to understand in the context of the development of the English language and culture.

The identity chasm being problematic might also indicate a conservative view of culture and language on the part of Chickering. By stating that a big chasm between the two

cultures is an issue, he might imply that modern values have supplanted whatever worth the *Beowulf* poet could pass onto the future generations. However, it can be argued that the very fact that there are such numerous attempts at translating *Beowulf* is indicative of a reinterpretation of values and the legacy that the English identity holds dear. Firstly, it shows that there is a certain amount of interest in the Anglo-Saxon period of English history, and that there might be a part of its legacy worth preserving. Secondly, it shows that perhaps the way in which we have perceived the Anglo-Saxon culture and language so far is lacking in some respect. From an identity point of view, the proliferation of *Beowulf* translations is entirely justified and quite interesting to ponder over.

However, there seems to be a linguistic and stylistic reason for the appearance of numerous *Beowulf* translations. When translating literary works, the translator must determine how close to the original their own work should be. The problem indicated by Chickering is that there is seemingly little consensus on what constitutes a faithful modern rendition of *Beowulf*, even though the academia have determined the key tenets of the literary style and linguistic expression of the *Beowulf* poet. This has led to problems with determining which of the translations should be the standard Modern English *Beowulf*.

As far as style goes, Chickering points out that some features of Old English poetry, such as alliteration, parataxis and compounding, have been in constant use throughout the history of English poetry, and remain well-received stylistic devices in Modern English. However, as Chickering points out, the net effect of kennings and alliteration is rather different in Old English than it is in Modern English as are the conditions of their use and creation. This causes the allure of using literal Modern English equivalents and translations of Old English devices and linguistic structures which do not turn out satisfying. This perpetual search for satisfactory Modern English equivalents results in new Beowulf translations constantly appearing, which is cumbersome, but exciting at the same time as it holds great promise for a bright future of *Beowulf* studies.

"At the same time, other translations of *Beowulf* will continue to appear as the 2000s roll along, and among them English teachers will find equally good translations, of mixed success, to choose from. In turn, those translations will annoy students who have learned Old English and have read the poem in the original. Some few of them will always have the chutzpah to think they have enough poetic talent to render the original into Modern English verse. And *Beowulf* will go on being newly translated for the foreseeable future." (Chickering 177)

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